GENRE AND IDENTITY

IN THE WORKS OF DAVID GROSSMAN

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ABSTRACT

Genre and Identity in the Works of David Grossman

David Grossman is a central figure in Israeli literature. Widely translated, his work has achieved international acclaim for its bold and innovative engagement in the events and mood of the day. In this study, the first monograph on his work in English, I focus on his process of constructing identity through storytelling. Key themes of identity – adolescence and parent-child relationships, sexuality and the body-soul dichotomy – are interwoven into diverse literary genres.

My method is to examine the paradigms and significance of Grossman's literary genres, placing them in the context of Israeli and Western literature. I analyse his technique of manipulating traditional structural features of these genres to reveal the ambiguities and changing nature of identity. I show how he acknowledges his literary forefathers by his use of intertext to develop identity.

I contend that Grossman's focus on the adolescent protagonist pinpoints a young person's confrontation with his inherited identity. I discuss The Book of Intimate Grammar as anti-*Bildungsroman*, illustrating the instability experienced en route to a cogent sense of self and an accommodation with the adult world.

Grossman breaks new ground in his seminal work of Holocaust fiction, See under: Love. Moving beyond the sphere of witness accounts and their consequent fiction, he uses a fragmented plot and complex narratives, revealing the impossibility of viewing the Holocaust as a single synchronic story, exposing the damaged identities that remain.

In Be My Knife, his more recent epistolary novel, I find a shift in his construction of identity. Rhythms of internal and external languages combine in this exploration of sexuality and parenthood.

I suggest that his narrative techniques of multiple voices and indeterminate endings enhance reader involvement. They are a call to share Grossman's enduring commitment to a "wide-hearted humanism". This credo involves creating an ethical identity of self-examination, facilitating the recognition of difference in self and others, as evidenced in his socio-political novel and essays.

I highlight Grossman's artistry: his sensitivity to registers of language, expressing sociological aspects of Israeli life in the past decades. Ultimately, for Grossman, both the world and the "I" are but a narrative.

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> "I feel a certain hunger for blood; for, that is, writing about literature that talks of human lives and choices as if they matter to us all... One of the things that makes literature something deeper and more central for us than a complex game, deeper even than those games... that move us to wonder by their complex beauty, is that... it speaks *about us*, about our lives and choices and emotions, about our social existence and the totality of our connections. As Aristotle observed, it is deep, and conducive to our inquiry about how to live, because it does not simply (as history does) record that this or that event happened; it searches for patterns of possibility – of choice, and circumstance, and the interaction between choice and circumstance – that turn up in human lives with such a persistence that they must be regarded as *our* possibilities."[1]

In the above quotation Martha Nussbaum illuminates a belief in the power of literature and the vigorous role of the author in qualifying choices for the reader as to how one should live, a role which I believe David Grossman richly fulfils. Israeli writers, in particular, are "addressing the existential question of where one identity ends and another begins", confirms Amy Wilentz.[2] For Grossman as writer, there is a symbiotic energy which underlines the power of literature, and enhances its influence on personal insight. The process of writing a story is a profoundly invigorating one, "an act of self-definition". This is an intensity which Grossman relishes: "I want it to destabilize and dissolve all the comfortable defences of my life. ... My soul is on guard."[3]

In this introduction I discuss problematics I have encountered in my analysis of Grossman's work and the "patterns of possibility"[4] he creates in the course of his writing, the "interaction between choice and circumstance"[5] that gives his literature such power. Maureen Whitebrook, too, has argued that novels "present choices, the implications and consequences of choices."[6]

The challenge of writing a critical work about a living author is linked precisely to the absence of a point of summation or a final vision of his opus. Nevertheless David Grossman's work merits a close analytical study because of his dominance in Israeli literature. Widely translated, his work has achieved international acclaim for its bold and innovative engagement with the events and mood of the day. Born in 1954, six years after the founding of the State of Israel, Grossman has grown up with the country. His work, beginning with his first collection of stories published in 1983, continues to reflect the cross-currents and multiple voices which have shaped Israeli society. I am aware that the search for narrative identity will continue and perhaps change in his work-in-progress.

For the purposes of this study I am using narrative identity to mean the construction of identity through story-telling. All reference to identity is in the sense of narrative identity. Shlomit Rimmon-Kenan has articulated this concept: "An affinity between 'narrative' and 'identity' has been suggested in many disciplines. I wish to benefit from this insight and replace the term 'identity' by 'narrative identity'... We lead our lives as stories, and our identity is constructed both by stories we tell ourselves and others about ourselves and by the master narratives that consciously or unconsciously serve as models for ours."[7] Throughout my discussion of identity as memory, myth, rite-of-passage, interrelationship with

social, political family entities in this thesis I am proposing the sense of construction of identity through storytelling.

In this thesis I am conducting an English dialogue with an author whose work is originally written in Hebrew. This conundrum continues to be encountered every time significant literature is written in a minority language: it demands a wider reading public, yet is unlikely to be known or read other than by a relatively small number of national readers. The difficulties relate to accurately reflecting Grossman's inventive use of language: registers which convey social context and background, including Yiddish, Arabic and other vernacular expressions distinctive to the wide range of nationalities of Israel's multi-faceted society. Robert Alter confirms this: "David Grossman exerts the most precise and supple command of Israeli adolescent slang, circa 1963-67, which in the free direct style he uses, constantly modulates into the more poised and literate middle diction of the narrator."[8]

Shulamith Hareven has discussed the "immense richness of possibilities" of the Hebrew language and the ability to "delve into any linguistic layer to make your meaning or nuance more precise". She refers to the joys and compromises of choosing to write in Hebrew, and then requiring outsiders to translate one's work, lamenting the fact that such richness makes "Hebrew – good Hebrew – nearly untranslatable". I endorse her claim that "although much gets lost in translation, even more gets lost if you are not translated at all." At the risk of falling into her category of the traitors with whom one is forced to collaborate– "*traditore traduttore*" – I shall be discussing and quoting from Grossman's work primarily in its English versions, where available.[9] (In fact Grossman has proved to be one of

those authors whose work responds well to sensitive translating, and is exceedingly accessible, certainly in the English examples.)[10]

Examining of an author's work in translation includes an evaluation of response to his work, in his native country and abroad. Upon publication of his collection of stories, The Jogger, in 1983, David Grossman received critical acclaim and recognition as a rising star in the Israeli literary firmament. Debates on his style and the relevance of his contribution began: Gershon Shaked, Dan Miron, Ori Bernstein and Menachem Peri welcomed the freshness of his work. They acknowledged his creative innovations in language and dialogue, whilst operating within the traditions created by his literary "older brothers", A.B. Yehoshua and Amos Oz.[11] Links were traced to other Israeli writers, like Yitzhak Ben Ner and Dan Ben Amotz, whilst clear intertextual parallels were drawn to writers from other countries. By contrast there were critics, Ehud Ben Ezer for example, who rued what they saw as an abundant outpouring of vocabulary, a self-indulgent meander through streams of self-consciousness.[12]

Despite these mixed reviews, Grossman's position in the canon of Israeli literature was secured by the publication of three significant works within the space of six months: The Jogger (his collection of stories), Smile of the Lamb (his first novel) and Duel (a book primarily for children, which preceded both of them). The Israeli public knew Grossman already as a radio personality, from two weekly radio programmes – "Good Evening from Jerusalem" and "Sheshet", an entertainment programme on Friday afternoons.

Shaked acknowledges Grossman's decisive impact and hails him as the "legitimate heir to the 1960's generation"[13] praising both his ability to revolutionise the heritage from within, as well as his originality. Some critics who favoured

Grossman's early work struggled with later innovations and changes in rhythm. In a sense their reviews punish him for his decision to change genre.[14]

For a perspective on the response to Grossman's writing from outside of Israel, I turn to Alan Mintz, who has addressed the question of presenting Hebrew literature to a primarily English speaking readership. He calls the phenomenon of the translation of Hebrew literature "a spiritual bridge... being built between Israel and the Diaspora".[15]

He refers to the time frame of translations of an author, and the resulting disparity of reception garnered in Israel and elsewhere. For example he refers to Grossman's "jumbled career" in America, as a result of the mismatched timing of the translation of his work into English.[16] Known in America for his political reporting before much was known of Grossman the novelist, his reception was "kidnapped" by the success of his collection of essays, The Yellow Wind, which the American reading public found "accessible in the manner of New Yorker reporting that informs readers about distant afflictions while confirming their previously-held moral convictions." They were "unprepared for the ambitiousness and difficulty of Grossman's big Holocaust novel when it was belatedly placed before them." Mintz compares the American response to that of Israeli readers, who recognised, when the essays were published, "that this was Grossman journalizing between novel projects."[17]

Further to the question of response, Mintz refers to the significant role of reviewers as "mediators between cultures". Their sympathy and understanding of the language and culture of the "foreign" author greatly determines the influence their review and hence the book itself will have. Through the channels of the intellectually prominent journals[18] are to be found the enduring comparisons against

whom Grossman is measured: Garcia Marquez, Faulkner, Rushdie, Melville, Joyce and Kafka, in addition, of course, to Bruno Schulz. "The purpose of all this glorious name-calling is both to domesticate the foreignness of these writers by comparing them to familiar masters and to make claims for their non-parochial importance."[19] Yet Mintz acknowledges that Israeli literature needs to safeguard its own identity.[20] Mintz is expressing a more general comment which had been raised by Alter, "Grossman's work is addressed in the first instance to an Israeli reality and an Israeli audience."[21]

Clive Sinclair, writing about the reception of Israeli literature in Great Britain, claims that only Amos Oz and David Grossman have crossed "that invisible boundary", to become a visible part of the local literary scene. He identifies them as "a meta-national writers, both Israeli and universal".[22] Linda Grant claims "He's the voice in Israeli writing that strips away the layers of defence against caring in a climate where sympathy can be wrongly equated with weakness."[23]

Clearly See under Love is the novel that has made the most significant impact internationally. George Steiner has described it as "one of the great feats in modern fiction."[24] In Italy there is a new interest in and broadened understanding about Israeli life through its literature. See under Love was published in Italy in 1988 and hailed as an "outstanding literary event"; it won the Vallombrosa literary prize in 1989. Grossman's work has also been compared to Marquez by Italian critics.[25] The first language of translation of Grossman's books is invariably Italian. Clearly a strong resonance has been felt by the Italian reading public for this literature.

There are other important consequences in the choice of Hebrew for written texts: Professor Ruth Kartun-Blum draws attention to the complexity of language

for the author writing in Modern Hebrew. Even as native-born Israelis were developing their literary skills in Hebrew, they were aware that Hebrew was not the language of their mothers' lullabies, not the mother-tongue of their parents.[26] Children hear their parents express their most intimate thoughts in the foreign tongues of the alien "outside" world of the Diaspora; naturally, to children this often conveys conflicting affiliations. In addition, as masters of the dominant language and the norms of the host society, children become the guides of their parents – a reversal of the familiar pattern in settled societies. Grossman's sensitivity to registers of language reflects the sociological aspects of language development of the past decades for a nation built largely on immigration, with the resulting nostalgia and sense of strangeness within the language. This links directly to the application of Bakhtin's concept of *heteroglossia* for understanding how Grossman works with language. The term means the multiplicity of languages within the apparent unity of any national language[27] In Grossman's work it functions as the sense of the different languages that cumulatively form the internal language in a person's head. Most frequently it appears as the author's innovative working of language and its "intimate grammar" in a child's mind: the struggle for the child's own authentic language, once these others have been internalised and personalised, through experience and crisis.

How close is the interrelationship between a writer's fictional work and his political essays? In her recent article Wilentz discusses the continued impact of political events, and the symbiotic tension between literature and non-fiction. "Read these writers' non-fiction, and you will find essayists and reporters profoundly involved with the political life of their times. Read their fiction, and it's like

listening to the inner workings of anyone's heart, a soft beat, a complicated inner rhythm."[28] Amos Oz expands this: "In our part of the world, the lines between fantasy, invention, documentation and confession are not necessarily as sharp as they are in other places." Yet he too claims that his novels are more closely related to issues of good and evil, are "metapolitical rather than political."[29]

Grossman asserts that the impetus to write fiction and the impetus to write essays or articles stem from different needs: "I am not a journalist – if I had my way, I would lock myself up at home and write only fiction. But the daily reality in which I live surpasses anything I could imagine, and it seeps into my deepest parts. Sometimes writing an article is the only way for me to decipher, to understand, and to survive from day to day."[30]

The dynamic of Israel's history during the twentieth century differs dramatically from that of the West. Culturally and socially the country has followed different codes, with a different role for the writer in society. A new nation was being forged from disparate groups of people with diverse experiences and exigencies of Jewish history over the turbulent century. In this study I have addressed the contribution of one Israeli author to the construction of identity through storytelling, how his art affects "our lives and choices and emotions, about our social existence and the totality of our connections".[31]

The role of the writer in Israeli society has a long-standing connection to the notion of an intelligentsia that was evident in Eastern Europe, where many of the early writers of Modern Hebrew literature originated. This concept relates to a group of philosopher-writers who influenced the current belief systems and moral attitudes of the day. It derives from the biblical model of a prophet, but evolved

after the secularisation of Jewish society, in Eastern Europe and then in the Land of Israel, into the writer as Watchman of the House of Israel – הצופה לבית-ישראל.[32] Several prominent Hebrew writers during the 20th century have played a part in society as members of parliament (for example S. Yizhar and Moshe Shamir). Many more have contributed to Israel's characteristically vigorous interchange of ideas, in the form of regular newspaper columns and journal articles (Natan Alterman, Haim Gouri and Meir Shalev, to name but a few). More specifically, Amos Oz, A.B. Yehoshua and David Grossman are frequently consulted on their political and moral standpoints at key interchanges during the course of Israel's troubled modern history. The titles of some of these collected articles underline the intensity of the ethical commentary they contain: Between Right and Right, by Yehoshua, Under this Blazing Light, by Oz, and Death as a Way of Life, by Grossman.[33] Amos Oz refers with irony to this phenomenon: "In the Jewish tradition, writers are supposed to be the prophets who show the way and get stoned in the marketplace."[34]

The adoption of broad-based national myths is particularly true for an Israel that had to construct a national identity out of the turmoil and catastrophe of the first half of the 20th century. Likewise, Israel's desire to integrate its diverse peoples into a cohesive society resulted in the creation of further myths. Recognition of these truisms is crucial to understanding the context of much of Grossman's writing, where he often refers, both overtly and subliminally, to myths in the sense of stories one absorbs as an infant, of images propounded in the public arena.

Nicola King provides a valuable analysis about memory and its role in creating myth: there exists a "complex negotiation between remembering and forgetting", a creative collaboration between past and present that "underpin the

ways in which a culture positions itself in relation to the past."[35] A leading example of this is the "New Hebrew", strong, unashamedly physical, free in the land of his forefathers – the very opposite of the reality of the Diaspora Jew, particularly the physically and spiritually broken survivors who eventually found their way to Israel. Nurith Gertz, who has made a broad study of Israeli culture, supports the concept of myth in her discussion of the dismantling and reforming of major narratives of identity by journalists, literary writers and film-makers during each of the periods following Israel's frequent wars. [36]

Many elements of myths and national narratives are interrogated by Grossman in his work. In his latest book of essays, he uses direct examples from political life to re-appraise the myth and role-model of the Israeli hero.

"In all that he did, (Yitzhak) Rabin was a product of the Sabra, the new native Israeli. The biography of this man... passed through all the archetypical formative stations of the Israeli character... But he wasn't a Sabra only in his peak moment. He was no less a Sabra in his weaknesses and mistakes. An entire generation could look at him as its reflection. They could see what happened to the mythological idealist, ideal Sabra when his life became entangled in the trivial matters of daily life... This is the DNA of the Israeli identity."[37]

In a second example he evaluates the figure of Ariel Sharon:

"A non-Israeli may have trouble understanding the secret of Sharon's seduction of the Israeli public. But the average Israeli perceives Sharon as a 'strong man'... Over a period of more than fifty years, Sharon has had a part in every important military and political campaign, and in many respects he is, for Israelis, one of the last living Sabra heroes, the native-born Israeli who is daring, rooted in the land, and prepared to fight for it to the death. In both his appearance and character he reminds many of

a biblical figure – a man of great physical prowess and primal urges, cunning, shrewd, and brave."[38]

As regards the relationship between ethics and literature, the claims of Alasdair MacIntyre, are particularly relevant for Israeli writers, who are never entirely free from the swaddling clothes (the constraints, hopes, promises and apprehension) of the new nation:

> "I inherit from the past of my family, my city, my tribe, my nation, a variety of debts, inheritances, rightful expectations and obligations. These constitute the given of my life, my moral starting point... For the story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity. I am born with a past; and to try to cut myself off from that past, in the individualist mode, is to deform my present relationships... Notice that rebellion against my identity is always one possible mode of expressing it.
>
> Notice also that the fact that the self has to find its moral identity in and through its membership in communities such as those of the family, the neighbourhood, the city and the tribe does not entail that the self has to accept the moral *limitations* of the particularity of those forms of community. Without those moral particularities to begin from there would never be anywhere to begin; but it is in moving forward from such particularity that the search for the good, for the universal, consists."[39]

Grossman's opus is the expression of his literary development from within his complex community as he continues to seek and sustain an appropriate moral perspective. Unflinchingly he advocates a "wide-hearted humanism"[40] in every sector and circumstance of society. He uses diverse literary genres to reveal the challenges inherent in this pursuit. And he reinforces the idea of personal legacy for the writer: "As a child I wondered what did I inherit from my parents, and today I'm

asking myself what part of me is in my children. That's the issue explored in all my books."[41]

Martha Nussbaum connects moral questioning squarely with literature, for the range of insights it affords: "We live among bewildering complexities. Obtuseness and refusal of vision are our besetting vices. Responsible lucidity can be wrested from that darkness only by painful, vigilant effort, the intense scrutiny of particulars."[42] In her chapter "Reading for Life", she engages in a dialogue with Wayne Booth, particularly with his work on ethical criticism and literature, The Company We Keep.[43] She endorses Booth's position that literature plays a key role in extending our understanding of life, that our relationships with literary works are "important elements in the building of character."[44] Nussbaum's claims are echoed by David Parker who expands on the "complex interlocutory process" that literature enables. "Univocal insights and affirmations" are not presented as a "final vocabulary" or master narrative, but are "always being brought into a searching dialogic interrelationship with other dramatised insights and affirmations" in the novel.[45] Grossman more than most authors eschews a univocal approach in favour of a multitude of voices, to better attain something like the truth.

In his work Grossman focuses on quintessential qualities of human nature and the struggle for understanding oneself: only by attaining personal insights can one turn outward to the salutary embrace of a "wide-hearted humanism"[46]. The processes of interior debate and search for self-awareness lead to *anagnorisis* (self-discovery) and finally to *phronesis* (practical wisdom).[47] Part of his process is his capacity to take a multifaceted approach. "We have an instinct for regarding each and every given situation from different points of view... I write from your point of view, then from my point of view... or my child's or your child's. You envelop a

situation from as many sides as possible. A society in crisis teaches itself to congeal into one story only and sees reality through very narrow glasses. But there is never only one story."[48]

Within this understanding of literature, and more specifically of Grossman's writing with an ethical imperative as he constructs identity[49], the way is open to explore how Grossman achieves his aims.

Genre is the literary representation of life's "patterns of possibility"[50], which is why I have chosen to explore Grossman's oeuvre through the prism of genre. He writes in a range of literary genres, presenting different perspectives and narrative structures. Certainly Grossman's rich oeuvre can be analysed through other modes, but I have found that using the structure of genre best reveals his technical excellence and his psychological acuity. Analysing Grossman's work according to the structure or code of each selected genre will expose both how he works within the literary traditions, and his originality, his disrupting of "familiar literary boundaries"[51] to produce innovation. I will argue that his innovations lie particularly in his interrogation of identity.

"Genre functions like a code of behaviour established between the author and his reader," Heather Dubrow contends in her definition of genre.[52] Exploring these codes creates an understanding of the cultural attitudes that are transmitted, and the myths that a society disseminates for and about itself. The codes work both on a strict technical and a broad human level. Genres are like human personalities in structure and function, where certain characteristics predominate. Amos Oz has reinforced the idea of a contract between author and reader. "The link to be explored is... between the reader and the work." A "good book" will lead the reader

to learn more about the world, and about himself.[53] The choice of a particular genre has several important resonances: the author enters a generic contract with the reader relating to the reader's knowledge of the period and context of the author, as well as his expectations about the author from previous work.

In addition to the contract with the reader, the author enters into a dialogue with authors of previous works in that genre, highlighting the ways his attitudes and the art they shape are different from those of the past and questioning the underlying attitudes that shape that literary mode. Genres are never static, as Todorov claims. "For there to be a transgression, the norm must be apparent... Genres are precisely those relay-points by which the work assumes a relation with the universe of literature."[54]

Further perspectives need to be taken into account in this discussion of genre. Todorov's caveat that no neat pattern exists in the movement from one genre to the next explains how two modes, genre and anti-genre,[55] can be active at the same time, even in one work. Just as the choice of genre sets up a series of expectations on the part of the reader regarding previous works in that mode and previous cultures which nourished it, so the use of anti-genre subverts the expectations of the reader. I discuss Grossman's use of anti-genre to establish a different contract: the author challenges the expectation of what cannot happen in a given work as much as what can happen; he challenges the "horizon of expectations" as defined by Jauss[56]. He is working from familiarity with the generic code, to a sense of de-familiarisation, thereby casting his scenario in a new light. The process of renewal and innovation, intensifying expectations only to overturn them, defines the shape of Grossman's work.

I consider Grossman's complex construction of identity through story-telling and narrative. The technique of binary opposition, of norm and transgression of genre (which I discuss in each of the following chapters 1-5), interacts with the process of exposing and dissecting the myths upon which a society assembles both its national and individual personas.

"Man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal", claims MacIntyre, "...a teller of stories that aspire to truth. But the key question for men is not about their own authorship; it is 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'"[57]

Nussbaum refers to "the interaction between choice and circumstance", and the "patterns of possibility" in literature[58]. Within the construction of identity through narrative lies the innate concept of choice. In Grossman's oeuvre, children are questioning choices made for them by the adults contiguous to their world, and against which they must wrestle to cross the divide between the two domains. By contrast, adults are compelled to bear responsibility for choices they have made, or to reform them by grappling to retrieve a different life story for themselves. Nussbaum further emphasises the connection between genre and meaning in narrative identity: "form and style are not incidental features (in literature). A view of life is *told*. The telling itself – the selection of genre, formal structures, sentences, vocabulary, of the whole manner of addressing the reader's sense of life – all of this expresses a sense of life and of value."[59]

Grossman has acknowledged the original stimulation of his desire to write by tracking his literary forefathers. Kartun-Blum illuminates that transitional point between the spark of inspiration – here acknowledged by the author – and the

ignition of a literary chain of events; the complex transition from the author's intimate internal dialogue to that of his protagonist.[60] Grossman's sources of inspiration account for his choices of genre and the resulting questioning of identity. The need to find an authentic vocabulary is ever uppermost in Grossman's mind from the point of view of the individual and of society.

The representation in narrative of traumatic memory, both personal and historical, is a theme that Nicola King discusses, and her observations are most pertinent to consideration of Grossman's deservedly famous "Holocaust novel". King identifies the notion of traumatic memory as a continual process of "retranslation", of "re-memory".[61] Through his use of fantasy, dissolving boundaries of time and space, Grossman assimilates survivor experiences into a present-day Israeli psyche and identity.

His exploration of identity through storytelling is as vigorous and multifaceted as the community from which he has sprung. He delves into the inner kernel and the outer expression of self through his plurality of narratives. Identity is the dominant theme that informs all his writing, fiction and non-fiction. In heeding Mintz's caveat about the order of translations[62], particularly in Grossman's case, I shall be looking at his work and his treatment of genre chronologically – save where a genre has been more frequently employed, and the development achieved requires concurrent consideration.

One of the genres Grossman both uses and deliberately subverts in a number of his novels is the *Bildungsroman*. Yet during the course of writing this thesis a paradoxical element has emerged: I have begun to view Grossman's opus itself as a *Bildungsroman* in its over-arching significance and development. Thus the central

issues of the *Bildungsroman* as they interconnect in Grossman's writing can be seen to represent a similar internal development.[63] This overview is not intended as a comment on the development of Grossman's personality, but rather as a spotlight supporting Buckley's claim regarding "the novelist's personal stake in his materials and his considerable identification with the sensibility of his hero." Buckley draws on the symbiotic energy between hero and author "who, turning to the *Bildungsroman* to assess his own development... all the while, by the very act of writing, is himself an artist."[64]

The questions and challenges in all of Grossman's writing revolve around the moral dilemmas of a young nation, as it grows and defines itself, measuring itself in microcosm and in macrocosm against the world it finds itself inhabiting. He addresses the key themes of identity reflected in rites-of-passage through diverse literary genres. He has written weightier novels and more playful ones, writing for all stages of readership: children, young adults, adults[65]. In his adult novels he explores the inception of the story, with the young boy encountering the adult world. His prevailing narrative voice (to date) is that of the young adolescent in the process of "education" into the adult world. This voice reflects that moment where intuition meets learned behaviour, and is adopted by writers to convey the dysfunction at the junction of youth and adulthood. Naomi Sokoloff reinforces the prevalence of childhood-dominated fiction in "Hebrew writing, a literature centrally concerned with national identity in a time of rapidly changing political circumstances and shifts in self-definition."[66]

"Grossman's fiction has grown increasingly intimate"[67], as Linda Grant has indicated; this too follows the process of development within the *Bildungsroman*. From an "intimate grammar" of childhood he moves towards an illumination of

adult interaction *Bildung* as spiritual maturity, whereby the project of *Bildung* "entails a break with the false security of man's spiritual childhood" is highlighted by Walter Sokel.[68]

Ironically, Grossman seems to acknowledge, the adult can and should still learn a lot from the child within him. Tom Stoppard specifies this moment in the creative process: "However sophisticated you get, you always arrive at a moment of reversal when you realise you are lost and you have to spring back to the mind of a child... to seek refuge in intuitive understanding."[69] Yehuda Amichai reinforced the need of the artist to be connected to the child's world view: "A poet is someone who keeps asking himself what is happening to the child within him. My escape route to childhood is always open."[70]

I will show that a key factor in Grossman's work is the stimulus towards realising a better understanding of oneself: awareness of one's internal impulses and contradictions lead to an appreciation of difference; a difference moreover that will not automatically be reflected as otherness or evil. Grossman breaks down the boundaries of identity that are constructed on stereotype and myth. Grossman articulates this in the very process of writing: "We have an instinct to protect ourselves from the chaos and danger of other people, and also from the Other inside us that we don't know... but when you write a story you must become another person, peeling off layers of cataract from the soul."[71] As with the *Bildungsroman* hero, all of Grossman's protagonists grapple to find a point in their life where there is acceptance of their role within the family and society, in the private and the public domain. And such acceptance leads to a position where they believe "I think I can live with it now."[72]

His need for the integrity of language haunts Grossman to the present day. He has always felt the urgency of using appropriate vocabulary and grammar, with their corresponding moral connotations.[73] "When I write, I try to enlarge my emotional dictionary, not to surrender to apathy or paralysis; to show nuances. Every human story is so complicated that no one side is 100% right or wrong; each has its justice and its suffering. When I write stories I reclaim things that have been confiscated and the right to be a human being in a situation that tries to obliterate my human qualities."[74]

The role of memory in enhancing truth as well as destroying it continues to be interrogated. This questioning extends the metaphor of *Bildungsroman* that I have used in my consideration of David Grossman's opus: the author of a *Bildungsroman*, still in the process of creating his full vision, needs to end the work *in medias res.*

INTRODUCTION

[1] Martha C. Nussbaum, Love's Knowledge – Essays on Philosophy and Literature (Oxford, 1992), 171. The first sentence of this extract is Nussbaum's response to Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra, which she quotes: "Of all that is written, says Zarathustra, I love only what a man has written with his blood." Hereafter Nussbaum, Love's Knowledge.

[2] Amy Wilentz, "Three Israelis Divide Their Lives Between Literature and Life". New York Times, 13 December 2003. Hereafter Wilentz, "Between Literature and Life".

[3] David Grossman, "Seven Days: A Diary – October 2001", in Death as a Way of Life – Israel Ten Years After Oslo. Translated by Haim Watzman, edited by Efrat Lev (New York, 2003) 145, 142. Hereafter Grossman, Death as a Way of Life.

[4] Nussbaum, Love's Knowledge, 171, quoted on p4 above.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Maureen Whitebrook, "Taking the Narrative Turn: What the novel has to offer political theory" in John Horton and Andrea T Baumeister, editors, Literature and the Political Imagination. (London, 1996) 33.

[7] Shlomit Rimmon-Kenan "the Story of "I": illness and narrative identity (1). (Prologue). Ohio 2002, 3 http://www.highbeam.com/library/doc3.asp?docid=1G1:83035620. I am grateful to sholomit Rimmon-Kenan for her clear definition, and I take my cue from her)

[8] Robert Alter, "The Reception of Modern Hebrew Literature Abroad – the Rise and Rise in the United States", Modern Hebrew Literature, Fall/Winter 1991, NS7, 7. Hereafter Alter, "Modern Hebrew Literature Abroad".

[9] Shulamith Hareven, "The Limits of My Language are the Limits of My World", p49 in The Vocabulary of Peace – Life, Culture and Politics in the Middle East (San Francisco, 1995).

[10] Where difficult anomalies in the translation of a work occur, I refer to them in the relevant chapter, for example Chapter Three p127.

[11] I am referring to the literary evolution brought about by Yehoshua and Oz. The response and counter-response to the dynamic of the different periods and wars, over the course of the century of Hebrew literature, has been well documented by Gershon Shaked, amongst others. This analysis includes consideration of the nationalist writers of the Generation of the War of Independence, who wrote chiefly about collective Zionist ideals, and the rhythm of wars and following literary responses. Gershon Shaked, *Gal Ahar Gal Ba-siporet Ha-Ivrit* (Wave after Wave in Hebrew Fiction; in Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1985) and Modern Hebrew Fiction, translated by Yael Lotan, edited by Emily Miller Budick (Bloomington IN, 2000).

[12] Gershon Shaked, in *Sifrut Az, Ca'an Ve-Achshav* (Literature Then, Here and Now: literature, poetry and society, in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 1993), 50-54, reinforces this reception of his work. See Ilana Baum: "*David Grossman, LeFeta, Shlosha Sefarim*" ("David Grossman: Suddenly Three Books", in Hebrew) in *Ma'ariv* (17-1-1983). Also Yitzchak Ben Yosef, "*Ratz, Mitkadem, Nasog*" ("Run, Advance, Retreat", in Hebrew) in *Kol Tel Aviv* (15-4-1983), who praises the wealth of talent although he finds the standard of the stories uneven. For the negative reviews see Ehud Ben Ezer in "*Ha'Israeli Ha'Nimlat*" ("The Israeli who Escaped", in Hebrew) in *Ha'Aretz*, (26-8-1983) (Reference 1/7 from Genezim Newspaper Library, Tel Aviv), and "Zeligat Milim" ("Overflowing Words", in Hebrew) in *Ha'Aretz* (13-7-1983) (Reference 1/19 in Genezim).

[13] Shaked, Modern Hebrew Fiction, 231.

[14] I look at reaction to specific works of Grossman's in the relevant chapters. See also Chapter Two p79; Chapter Four p174, especially n104 and n105; Chapter Five p224 and n47.

[15] Alan Mintz, Translating Israel – Contemporary Hebrew Literature and its Reception in America (Syracuse, 2001), 294. Hereafter Mintz, Translating Israel.

[16] Ibid, 192.

[17] Ibid, 193.

In America, The Smile of the Lamb was seen as only partially successful. In Israel, by contrast, it was highly regarded, won significant literary prizes, and was made into an important film.

[18] Mintz includes here Commentary, the New York Review of Books, New Republic, the Nation, the New Leader and Midstream.

[19] Mintz, Translating Israel, 250, n8.

[20] Ibid, 15.

[21] Alter, "Modern Hebrew Literature Abroad", 7.

[22] Clive Sinclair, "Hard Heads and Commercial Decisions", Modern Hebrew Literature, Fall/Winter 1991 NS7, 13.

[23] Ibid.

[24] George Steiner, quoted in Ibid.

[25] Gabriella Moscati Steindler, "A New Understanding", Modern Hebrew Literature, Fall/Winter 1991 NS, 11-12.

[26] Ruth Kartun-Blum (ed.), Writers and Poets on Sources of Inspiration (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 2002). From Introduction, 20. Hereafter Kartun-Blum, Sources of Inspiration.

[27] The term *heteroglossia* was coined by Bakhtin in the essay "Discourse in the Novel" in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, Texas, 1998). Naomi Sokoloff refers to Bakhtin's concept of *heteroglossia* in her analysis of the child's voice in Imagining the Child in Modern Jewish Fiction (London, 1992); I will refer to this in Chapter Three p100 and n23, and Chapter Four p138 and n6.

[28] Wilentz, "Between Literature and Life" 1.

[29] Ibid, 2.

[30] Grossman, "Preface" in Death as a Way of Life, viii.

[31] Nussbaum, Love's Knowledge, 171.

[32] The Watchman of the House of Israel (1858) is the title of a book by Isaac Erter (1792-1851). David Patterson refers to his influence on, and contribution to, the development of the early Hebrew novel in his satirical and didactic methodology as well as his "handling of plot, narrative, characterization and dialogue". David Patterson, A Phoenix in Fetters: Studies in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Hebrew Fiction (Savage, Maryland, 1988), 10-11. Hereafter Patterson, Phoenix. Miron discusses Erter's work in the context of the new Hebrew writer "intellectually bound by the human and rational limits of his vision." Dan Miron "H.N. Bialik and the Prophetic Mode", The BG Rudolph Lectures in Judaic Studies, New Series Lecture Two (Syracuse, 2000), 17-18.

[33] A recent example of this phenomenon can be seen in the *Ha'aretz* newspaper of 10-10-2003, which focuses on the response of several prominent authors to a moral crisis in the ongoing Intifada: the concern of pilots about firing into populated areas of Gaza and the West Bank, with the risk to civilian life this could cause. There follows seven pages of interviews with David Grossman, Amos Oz, A.B.Yehoshua, Dalia Rabikovitch and Natan Zach, S. Yizhar and Joshua Sobol. Grossman stressed the need for accurate wording in the resulting petition: "This is not a sweeping endorsement of refusal to serve. The petition was worded so that it doesn't touch on the issue of refusal, but refers to the moral right of people to carry out an act of this kind." Natan Zach reinforces the moral impetus

of his commitment; "it makes us the only people who are still continuing to preserve the flickering ember of Jewish humanism..." *Ha'aretz*, Magazine Section, 10-10-2003, p 5.

[34] Wilentz, "Between Literature and Life", 3.

[35] Nicola King, Memory, Narrative, Identity: Remembering the Self (Edinburgh, 2000), 175, 5. Hereafter King, Memory.

[36] These myths have been explored in depth in the two following works:
Robert Wistrich and David Ohana (eds.), The Shaping of Israeli Identity - Myth, Memory and Trauma (London, 1995); and Nurith Gertz, Myths in Israeli Culture – Captives of a Dream (London, 2000). In his essay "Zarathustra in Jerusalem: Nietzsche and the 'New Hebrews'" (within The Shaping of Israeli Identity, page 50) Ohana refers to the concept of the New Hebrew that was promoted from as early as 1912 in Warsaw, as well as the responses and counter-responses to this image.

[37] Grossman, "After Rabin's Assassination – November 1995", in Death as a Way of Life, 27-28.

[38] "Hours Before the Elections – February 2001", ibid, 112.

[39] Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory; 2nd ed. (London, 1985), 220-221. Hereafter MacIntyre, After Virtue.

[40] This phrase represents the leitmotif of Grossman's philosophy throughout his present opus. It is taken from his collection of essays and interviews, The Yellow Wind (London, 1989), 195.

[41] Eilat Negev, Close Encounters with Twenty Israeli Writers (London, 2003), Ch 16: David Grossman, 'I'm and Egg without a Shell', 136. Hereafter Negev, Close Encounters.

[42] Nussbaum, Love's Knowledge, 148.

[43] Wayne Booth, The Company We Keep – An Ethics of Fiction (Berkeley, 1988).

[44] Nussbaum, Love's Knowledge, 232.

[45] David Parker, Ethics, Theory and the Novel (Cambridge, 1994), 60. Hereafter Parker, Ethics. Parker defines the ethical unconscious in imitation of Jameson's use of the political unconscious: "Everything is ethical, and our only options are to be conscious or unconscious of the fact", p 5.

[46] See note 40 above.

[47] I am grateful to David Parker for introducing me to this concept of *Phronesis* in the framework of literary perspectives and ethical criticism. It means understanding the relevance and practical nature of ethical reflection regarding the problematic question of how one should live. See Parker, Ethics, 37-8.

[48] Grossman, quoted in Wilentz, "Between Literature and Life", 4.

[49] Identity as the sense of self, composed through narrative, as discussed above p5.

[50] Nussbaum, Love's Knowledge, 171.

[51] Shaked, Modern Hebrew Fiction, 231

[52] Heather Dubrow, Genre. Series: The Critical Idiom (London, 1982), 2-11. Hereafter Dubrow, Genre.

[53] Amos Oz, "The Secret Agent from the Eighteenth Compartment", in Ch 12 of Negev, Close Encounters, 103.

[54] Tzvetan Todorov, The Fantastic – A Structural Approach to Literary Genre; trans. Richard Howard (Cleveland, Ohio, 1973), 8. Dubrow incorporates discussion of Todorov's viewpoints on genre, from this and his other works on the subject in Dubrow, Genre, 93-94.

[55] Anti- genre is a work whereby the terms of the contract that would be established by the author in his use of genre, as I have discussed above, are overturned. The effect is to alter the anticipated meaning of the text.

[56] Hans Robert Jauss, Toward an Aesthetic of Reception. Translated by Timothy Bahti. Introduction by Paul de Man (Minneapolis, 1994) 79. "Every work belongs to a genre – whereby I mean neither more nor less than that for each work a preconstituted horizon of expectations must be ready at hand (this can also be understood as a relationship of 'rules of the game' to orient the reader's understanding and to enable a qualifying reception."

[57] MacIntyre, After Virtue, 216.

[58] Nussbaum, Love's Knowledge, 171.

[59] Ibid, 5.

[60] Kartun-Blum, Sources of Inspiration, 11.

[61] King, Memory, 9.

[62] See p8 above.

[63] I discuss the scope and criteria of the *Bildungsroman* fully in Chapter Four, p141-169.

[64] Buckley, Season of Youth, 280.

[65] It is not within the scope of this thesis to do more than mention his books for children, Duel, for example, and the Itamar series.

[66] Naomi B Sokoloff, Imagining the Child in Modern Jewish Fiction (London, 1992) 9.

[67] "Tunneling to the Enemy", The Guardian, Saturday, 29-03-2003.

[68] Walter Sokel,"The Blackening of the Breast", 330 and 361 in Reflection and Action – Essays on the Bildungsroman edited by James Hardin (Columbia, South Carolina, 1991

[69] Tom Stoppard, Interview, Sunday Times, 8-6-2003, Culture section, page 11.

[70] Yehuda Amichai, "A Secular Prophet", in Negev, Close Encounters, Ch 6, 49.

[71] Grossman, quoted ibid.

[72] Susan Ashley Gohlman, Starting Over – the Task of the Protagonist in the Contemporary Bildungsroman (London, 1990), 25.

[73] Grossman has personally acted on this conviction outside of his writing, as I discuss in Chapter One p32-33, and especially the corresponding notes 17 and 18.

[74] Grossman, quoted in Linda Grant, "Tunneling to the Enemy", The Guardian.

CHAPTER ONE

Stories as Seeds

Grossman's need to turn to literature and to become a writer became evident to him at a young age. As a consequence of encountering the potent and evocative stories of Sholem Aleichem, David Grossman began looking for a way to access a similar power within himself, which would give voice to his understanding of the world: "From day to day, from page to page, something new grew inside me, an apprehensive understanding that all those things, seemingly strange and foreign to me, were me, were my father who was me. *That the code before me could be deciphered if I matched it with something inside me, which was hidden even from me, but which I suddenly felt*".[1]

The quotation resonates throughout David Grossman's work, identifying his need to decode and reveal the reality of the multi-facetted society he found himself born into.[2] As his literary output flourishes he continues to interrogate the moral complexities of identity, revealing accurate psychological insights about family and society. The precocious young boy, desperately trying to make out the realities of the adult world around him, becomes the archetypal protagonist of many of David Grossman's novels and children's work. With the passion of a child, recalled and translated by the visualisation of an adult, he presents the interior debate and articulate ethical response which epitomises all his writing. But the sensitive young boy portraying adolescent angst and relentlessly questioning both himself and society around him is not yet formed as the central protagonist in these stories. In contrast to his "portrait of an artist as a young man" that emerges in later novels,

The Jogger[3] stories present the "portrait of a soldier as an eternal outsider". This contrasts directly with the reality of the central role of the army for every Israeli family, whose fathers, sons and daughters too serve long years as soldiers.

In this chapter the following points are discussed

- The portrayal of the narrative identity of the soldier.
- The seeds of the genres and approaches that intimate Grossman's development in his growing opus.

Grossman focuses in this collection on the multiple facets of the persona of combatant, an entrenched reality of Israeli life. The soldier-protagonists depict diverse aspects of the search for self as Grossman evaluates the effects and implications of war on society. He is part of the Yom Kippur Generation, *Dor Milchemet Yom Ha-Kippurim*, writers whose formative experiences of Israel's confrontation with its neighbours were forged during that period and who responded to the changed political context of Israel. Grossman picks up his pen at the point where war and its consequences were under scrutiny. After the triumph of the Six Day War, the country, whose army had seemed all-powerful in the face of overwhelming odds, was caught off-guard. Israel's responses were being analysed through an ethical microscope. The Jogger collection comments on the euphoria of the Six Day War, and its results, especially the misjudgement of Israel's continuing vulnerability, and the profound sense of negligence that accompanied events leading up to the Yom Kippur War. The continuing occupation of West Bank territories was equally being questioned. A rupture in confidence was the result. The dynamic of Modern Hebrew literature is never free of the surrounding socio-political circumstances and milestones.

The five stories that appear in the collection The Jogger were first published as a collection in 1983, but appeared individually from 1979 to 1982. The title story, "The Jogger", deals with a disgraced runner and his lack-lustre army days, whilst "Donkeys" presents the shame of the deserter. Grossman writes about the eternal soldier in "Yani on the Mountain", sandwiched between the drudgery of his work as long-term soldier, and his fear of not finding meaning in life outside of the army barracks. In "Micha'el Tsidon, Michael" he uses the outsider to question the cost for the conquered and for the conquerors of the territories captured in the Six-Day War. Pursuing a different interest from all the other stories in this collection, "Cherries in the Icebox" nevertheless contends with a key focus of Grossman's ongoing writing: the internal development of the artist.

"THE JOGGER"

Thoughts and memories throb in the head of the disillusioned young runner, aged eighteen and a half, as he pounds along the familiar road from his home in Jerusalem to an army base camp, situated near an Arab village. The long stream-of-consciousness sentences delve into his thoughts about the young girl he used to visit there, and how they originally came to meet. There are echoes of Alan Sillitoe's novella, The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner, and his isolated and rebellious protagonist.[4] Sillitoe's protagonist is an "angry young man", fighting the system on his journey from a past that haunts him towards an unclear future. Similarly Grossman's protagonist is at war within, with his family and his society. "Jogger" touches on the painful predicament of a young talented sportsman, doomed to thwart his own and his parents' ambition, before they are properly realised. In his later novel, The Book of Intimate Grammar, inquiry into a young

man's crises and conflicts in his encounter with the outside world is developed within the genre of *Bildungsroman*. The pre-adolescent protagonist of the novel, Aron, wrestles with his very physiognomy, which appears to spurn all his fervent efforts to attain the status of Grown Up with any success.

The secret trysts between the protagonist and the artless young Arab girl arouse every manner of guilt for the young man, as he subconsciously breaks the profound social taboo on relationships between Jewish Israelis and Palestinian Arabs. His guilt and his confusion about natural adolescent instincts inform the emotions in this story.

Grossman introduces the refrain of the Mother's voice. Reproachful of her son, she needs a scapegoat to assign blame for the immense disappointment of her own life, expressed through vicarious hopes: "If only you could return to the boy you were, with your gifts and talents".[5] The archetypes of Mother and Father that are fully fleshed out in that later novel, The Book of Intimate Grammar, are first introduced here: Mother undermines his struggles, and is obsessed only with the obvious, shutting out any real communication or understanding. Her "x-ray eyes" seem to penetrate his soul, pre-empting any natural process of learning from the vicissitudes of competition. Importantly, in order to banish the destructive model of the Jewish mother from his list of characters in the later works under consideration in this thesis, Grossman denies her a voice altogether. In The Zig Zag Kid the mother has been romanticised, and placed in a different context completely: by the opening scenes of the novel she is no longer alive. Grossman's male characters are multi-dimensional whereas his female ones have fewer facets. He does not fully expand the persona of the female protagonists, and demotes them to a narrower range of character traits: the mother is possessive and overbearing in this story,

whereas Nimra is stridently assertive in "Yani on the Mountain". This question will be reappraised in the discussion on the female protagonists in Grossman's later works, in particular, Miriam in Be My Knife (see Chapter Five of this thesis) and Tamar in Someone to Run With (see Chapter Four).

The protagonist's father in "The Jogger" understands his son well because he too "deals in secrets."[6] As "a man of secrets", he represents the archetype of Aron's father in The Book of Intimate Grammar. Here is an intimation of the physical, corpulent person established in the later novel, where the burden of knowledge of his concealed possessions and hidden deeds will overwhelm Aron's life and expectations.

As a couple the parents depict the intimacy that is a natural, steamy, reproductive part of conjugal life, but quite unbearable for the troupe of young characters who populate Grossman's works. For the younger protagonists it takes on grotesque proportions, always resulting in the need to purify and distance such components of a relationship. The author is describing children's mortification about their parents' sexuality, and how it impacts on their own sense of sexual self. In Be My Knife he underlines the male protagonist's profound need to see the most intense of love relationships as separate from physical connection. When intimacy is attained, or even fully imagined, the bond is sullied, spoiled, corrupted. From a psychological point of view the protagonist's integrity and self-sufficiency appear violated, compromised, individual growth is thwarted. Self-realisation is always accompanied by the withdrawal from intimacy.

These concentrated concerns of the protagonist in "The Jogger" indicate the directions Grossman's future works will take. They also show the slightly victimised stance of the protagonist, buffeted by all the misfortunes that beset him,

and his attempt to grapple with the question of justice. The author introduces an innovative narrative technique of questioning the story, of reassessing its validity: "Not like this", "but it was possible too like this", and "and I still haven't told all of it".[7] He illuminates the fictional element of the story and the unreliability of a troubled narrator to present the whole story; a device he uses again in the last story of this collection. The narration, which switches from first person interior monologue to third person, reflects an ontological appraisal, an intrinsic search for self.

The story is internally and psychologically motivated; little is made of his experiences as soldier, as the focus is far more intensely concentrated on personal concerns. Nor is the external scenario of political issues the immediate context. Jerusalem, as I shall show in later chapters, is far from the romantic idealised representations of earlier pioneer writers. It is far away, too, from the symbolic and heavy representations of Amos Oz's Jerusalem, as seen in his story, "Strange Fire".[8] It is the pedestrian environment of the "kid on the block", of an average neighbourhood in a fairly indifferent city. None of the spiritually inspiring or colourfully exotic character of Jerusalem is allowed to emerge; none of the tensions regarding its division or liberation. Grossman is demystifying his choice of place, although we as readers cannot. He makes the experience more urbane primarily to highlight how the conflicting relationships concerning Jerusalem have so preoccupied the nation. This is brought into direct focus in The Book of Intimate Grammar, where all context is trivialised for the protagonist, Aron, including the build-up to the Six Day War, the setting of the novel. An entirely different tone of self-affirmation and of purpose is given to Assaf, in Grossman's later novel, Someone to Run With.[9]

The story carries a sense of distance and self-observation; the jogger sees himself as a character on a "celluloid film" which is replayed night after night on his nocturnal run. Some internal reconciliation is found, as he finally resolves to walk away from "that evening and that night".[10]

"DONKEYS"

"I had no idea what I should do now".[11] The concluding sentence of "Donkeys", the second story of the collection, casts a governing judgement over our reading of it. Grossman wrote it in 1979, whilst studying at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, where it won a student prize. It serves as a metonymy of expression for the sensitive, questioning Israeli soldier. The story is set early in the turbulent 1970s[12], the decade of the Yom Kippur War (1973), and in a sense marks the end of the period of elation that was occasioned by the Six Day War. This was an era that revealed gaps in the public's unfaltering trust in governing authority, and it sparked a reappraisal of the heroism of war.

At the cusp of a new decade in Israeli literature, a new cast list of literary characters is introduced, with the important return of the alienated figure. Yigal Schwartz has described the break with the modernist-Zionist narrative in terms of an "oedipal rebellion which can never be resolved"[13]. This early story of Grossman uses a realistic allegory to illustrate the break with the roles and duties placed on children by their fathers. He does not choose the kind of quasi-mythological tale chosen by Yehoshua in his story "Facing the Forests"; in fact, he displaces the locale from Israel altogether.[14] Enriching the panorama of soldier-identity, the themes of this story are War and the Deserter. The setting is Austria in the early 1970s, where an American soldier-deserter is hiding out after refusing to go back to

active service in Vietnam. The issues of the Vietnam War were shouted out across the American nation, and heard throughout the world. Disputes about the purpose and ethics of the war are well-known and well-documented. Grossman's story explores the pain, futility and absence of American idealism with regard to this war. Certainly for the ordinary soldier, enmeshed in the hardship of the ensuing jungle warfare, witness to his fellow soldiers dying and the brutal killing of others, any sense of commitment and pride were severely challenged.

To relate this to Israel, to take the mental jump of placing these issues squarely on the shoulders of a young Israeli writer and soldier (the author was no more than 25 when the story was published), is far more courageous. It raises questions of nationalism, Israeli pride and solidarity. Grossman breaks new ground, presenting a different genre of Israeli short story, with no focus on any specific element of Israel. Yet the war theme must be seen as pivotal to the Israeli world scenario, especially in the 1970s, when so much of the national effort was spent in self-preservation and in defending violent borders. Reading these stories as seeds for Grossman's later works, this story sets the scene for his questioning of the Israeli role and its validity regarding the occupation of West Bank territory. It links directly to his "insubordination" as radio journalist when he struggled against the news broadcasts about the first Intifada, the Palestinian uprising in Gaza and the West Bank in the late 1980s.[15] He was dismissed from the radio station, *Kol Yisrael*, for his non-compliance with what he called the "laundering of reality".[16]

In "Donkeys" he presents a portrait of uprootedness and disconnectedness. The narrator Roger Peters is a deserting soldier en route to visit his friend Martin, owner of a guesthouse and a herd of donkeys halfway up the mountain. Regular previous visits have brought refuge from his military status of deserter and his

unstable relationship with his girlfriend. He finds warmth and responsiveness from the mute animals. But as he stops to refill the car, he finds that a fire blazing along the side of the mountain bars his route. He is forced to seek shelter elsewhere overnight. Throughout the unfolding of the story, the protagonist feels rejected by everyone he encounters. All those he cares for are far away, disjointed in time and place.

The vision of the fire burns itself across the pages, representing loss and disorder. In "Facing the Forests", Yehoshua too uses the image of forest fire to the same effect. Peters hates the forest; however its burning alienates him further from his purpose.

Austria, used as a setting in a post-Holocaust story, is loaded with symbolism. In the Jewish collective unconscious it signifies moral depravity, citizens standing by during unspeakable cruelty and destruction.[17] The protagonist may not be designated as Jewish or Israeli, but his distaste for Austria and the Austrians, both articulated and unspoken, is powerful. It forms part of the pervading sense of despair that overwhelms the young man. The Austrian couple running the motel where he shelters practically keep him under house-arrest. The woman, Anna, is grotesquely seductive, whilst her husband is inscrutable and authoritarian. For Peters the Austrians' "creaking" use of English and slow deliberate switching to German for key words increase his isolation. In the dissonance of the foreign land, Grossman introduces the concept of *heteroglossia*[18] as connecting or alienating force which pervades all his books.

The image of the deserting soldier for Israeli readers carries a sense of disbelief and shame in a country where national service is regarded as a pivotal national duty.[19] In this story Roger Peters never talks of his parents. His isolation is

another signifier of the dismembering of his world. By choosing this subject, David Grossman leads the reader to compare the military scenario of Vietnam with Israel's wars, and the justification of war in general.

Other vignettes of existential futility are presented: Peters and his forlorn group of fellow criminal deserters buoy each other up, yet they continue to inhabit a no-man's-land of meaninglessness. In his personal relationships Peters is equally ineffectual. His illegal status and his allusions to an abusive relationship with his girlfriend reflect the dysfunction that weighs on all aspects of his life.

Running through the story with hypnotic energy is the excitement Roger Peters feels as he makes his way to see Martin and his herd of donkeys again, who offer the only caring and understanding he seems to receive. But we never encounter the real Martin, whose physical strength and potency are deteriorating. Peter's fantasies and dreams of certain relief and acceptance at Martin's place evaporate as the reality sets in: neither Martin nor his animals live there any more. They have left without clear trace... "I had no idea what I should do now".

This is a story of surprising despair and underlying questioning. Its open-endedness draws in the reader, a technique the author continues to use in his works. By focusing on the universal theme of war, he invites the reader to engage in the moral dilemma facing the protagonist. This tale begins on a very physical note, the smell and influence of the forest fire. But it ends with philosophical and ontological gloom.

"YANI ON THE MOUNTAIN"

For the next portrait of a soldier, the spotlight falls on Yani, an Israeli commanding officer in charge of an army camp, high on a desert mountain. It is

scheduled to be dismantled in a few days' time. Grossman explores in fine detail the nature of alienation that develops both for the individual protagonist and for the society of dislocated men around him in this camp.

The format of the story, Yani's journal entries, sets up an intimate platform for self-exposure and evaluation. It is augmented by Yani's rereading, or rewriting into his journal, of letters that he received from Nimra, his one-time girlfriend. This literary device of letters unfolding within layers of writing, creating different levels of reader-writer, is one Grossman returns to much later in his opus, in a work that is almost completely epistolary, Be My Knife. In his later work the genre is used to create tensions of concealment and discovery. In the earlier story Grossman experiments with the form, exploring its dramatic effect. The letters are significant to reaffirm and then distance Nimra's memory for Yani. He reads these letters and then casts them out into the desert wind to be lost to eternity. The pattern of his actions falls into the ritual of alienation he pursues as everything around him is set to implode.

More importantly, "Yani on the Mountain" is a diary written by the camp's commanding officer on the eve of closure of the entire operation. As Military Journal this could represent an official log, a document that chronicles decisions behind the events, an opportunity for others to scrutinise and evaluate the actions of the entire camp. Clearly this journal subverts such a model, as Grossman will subvert the genre of the dictionary in See under: Love (see Chapter Three). The diary's rhythm of self-awareness and self-denial are distinctly personal, far removed from a collective ideal of heroism that was typical of earlier portrayals of Israeli soldiers, during the time of the *Palmach* Generation. A pattern begins to be seen here in Grossman's stories where he shifts from the platform of national interests to

personal ones, from engagement in the society and its concerns to intense individual focus, sometimes within the same story. The recurring pendulum swing – from microcosm to macrocosm – is part of the dialectic process of literary evolution.

Grossman is following a perspective of the individual, disenchanted and severely diminished by his experiences in the army, first presented by A.B. Yehoshua in his story "The Last Commander".[20] In that story the weight of disaffection with army life and purpose is focused through the personality of the commander, mistrusted by his men and abusive of them. There are no heroes, only sleeping soldiers, misfits and the dead. Grossman's story too could have been called "The Last Commander".

Grossman picks up where Yehoshua left off; exploring the personality of Yani, whose dysfunction and isolation is symptomatic of this alienation of military life. He too is lost metaphorically in the military environment he has chosen. Questions of engagement with army life or national security are never presented as a focus of public heroism. Even the word "patriot" is devalued early on, in one of Nimra's letters: "You know I've never been a big patriot (what a revolting word!) and my return to Israel has got nothing to do with love of country (what's that?) or what you call our 'vital interests'..." Rather military life is seen in terms of "the joy of those who have survived one more war."[21]

The dialogic emphasis of the diary, first person narrator in conversation with himself, highlights the process of self-evaluation. His need for discovery or *anagnorisis* in Aristotelian terms is distinctive of Grossman's protagonists in most of these stories. The author reverses timeframes in his stories, he varies the narrative techniques and locus, but the denouement seems to hinge on a process of psychological analysis and the protagonist's self-searching[22]: the ethical-

psychological axis that will identify all his future work. The ethical dimension is closely linked to the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis,* of practical wisdom which involves the principle of living well and the promotion of good life for the whole community.[23]

Yani describes the intensity of feeling, of passion or dispassion, following the interaction of personalities, rather than any military activity. "This was the silly competition with which we amused ourselves in the apathy surrounding our lives here on the mountain, in the slightly anarchic atmosphere of those last days."[24] In this chronicle of the last days, it becomes clear that this was a basic army camp, with little to recommend it. "Because what did we actually have here? Hard living conditions, boredom and degeneration, and a longing to get out of here,"[25] claims Elisha, Yani's erstwhile friend, who has turned up at the camp nine years after his discharge, to conduct his own series of personal reappraisal. The absence of any real connection between soldiers debunks the myth of heroism and solidarity. Only juvenile games of competitive spitting and urinating remain.

But as Elisha and Yani discuss later, "friends in the army" holds no further expectation than "wisecracks and a laugh in the canteen... passing the unavoidable time as painlessly as possible."[26] Throughout the story Yani's responses towards Peretz the cook are patronising and malicious. Whilst Peretz idolises Yani, constantly attempting to please with food from the kitchen, and later is the only one able to calm the "boiling sea of hostility", it is clear that Yani has little understanding of those he has spent these months and years with. Elisha makes Yani confront this reality in a telling detail. He refers to Haim:

"'Haim? Who the Hell is that?'

'Your cook. Peretz. His first name's Haim.' He snickers. 'And you wanted to fight alienation here?'"[27]

By contrast Yani and Elisha, with Nimra interposed between them, had a far more profound friendship. Only the depth of Elisha's commitment can save Yani from mortal despair.

Yani is en route to destructive malevolence as he tries to starve Elisha. This evil inclination, this subversion of all natural instincts of support and intimacy between these supposed friends, is underscored by the narrator's self-questioning: "And I don't know why I lied, and what's being plotted inside me without my understanding it...Only inside my chest I feel my heart suddenly swelling in obscure excitement...Tentative joy, and obscure dread."[28] It becomes clear that Yani is trying to settle old scores. There is the same instinctive need to destroy any trace of warmth, and deny the exposure of emotional vulnerability that the narrator shows in "Three Days and a Child" by A.B. Yehoshua.[29] In that story he neglects the child in his charge, half-expecting and half-hoping for grim consequences. The dream-like quality of this destructive force shows the reverse of *phronesis*, of practical wisdom.

Interwoven into the present day of the story about Yani, are the details of Nimra's life. The history of a serious and passionate young woman, fervent in her idealism, is juxtaposed against the apathy and malevolence of the soldiers. Yani and Elisha had each adored Nimra, been devoted to her, but neither had shown sufficient passion for self-sacrifice (Yani) or for danger (Elisha) to capture her heart for very long. Misjudged and misplaced idealism and alienation from one's world become the core of this story, and are illuminated by bouts of despair, jealousy and

vicious manipulation. The feminine interest is rather bleak in this story. Nimra is always described as humourless and selfish. Her alter-ego, the young secretary Rinat, "always full of cheerful optimism"[30] becomes the brief focus of Yani's cruel and selfish lust. This interlude emphasises Yani's clear inability to relate to his colleagues, whilst his obsession with his own alienation continues. The sense of lost idealism pervades all these stories, and is part of the ontological process of self-knowledge.

The vision of the dead Egyptian soldier, trapped in the cabin of his crashed MIG plane, hovers over the novella. His image continues to haunt Yani over the years. It is his private secret, an image of the enemy as something human, symbolised by his moustache, "neatly trimmed, sticking up in jaunty, flirtatious maleness"[31] and continuing to grow even after his death. Elisha recognises Yani's "love for dead things, narcissistic love."[32] The question of masculinity, raised throughout the story, is linked here to death, not to the living, fearful, isolated soldier.

The most significant words in the story about self-discovery are revealed in the copy of one of Nimra's letters, and written in parentheses: "(it seems we have to move away to see what's closest to us.)"[33] Grossman is playing with the very topology of the written word: Yani's process of reading each letter, then casting it into the windstorms, further unites written word with emotional and geographic landscape. As the storm-clouds gather, during which time Yani experiences his most oppressive moods, as nature responds to the Yani's frenzied torment, the letters can no longer take flight. Yani recognises his and Elisha's impotence in the light of Nimra's total despair. "I already knew, from the tone of her words, from her beaten spirit, I knew – he would not be able to save her. And I too had nothing to

look forward to now."[34] In a synergetic response the writing dissolves in the rain, the pages disintegrated into the mud and become the "alienation that sticks". Later, in The Book of Intimate Grammar, Aron transforms words into living organisms; he internalises them, writes them on paper and swallows them.

There is a continued counterpoint between Yani and Elisha: only by understanding what they mean to one another, and how each has dealt with the pervading alienation, can they be saved. Hitherto Yani seems unable to reconcile the differences between military and civilian life. He is immobilised by the fear that the meaninglessness he encounters up on the mountain will be amplified in the outside world.

Elisha, a far more gentle and generous person, who has experienced the realities of both army and civilian worlds, can rein in Yani's free-floating anxiety, and reveal a different perspective: "'...you had such amazing strength. Destructive strength. You were even destroying yourself... People were afraid of you not because you trod on corpses, but because you trod on your own corpse.'"[35] Yani deprives Elisha of suitable sustenance, yet Elisha, cleansed and renewed from his ordeal, can gather his strength and retrieve Yani, mythical figure and coward, from the brink of despair.

Grossman examines the core of the military phenomenon of Israel, its self-perpetuating alienation, and judges it harshly, but not irredeemably.

The novella ends on a note of reconciliation:

"'Right. Come on Yan. There's nothing more for us here.'

'Nor outside either.'

'The game's outside, you fool.'"[36]

"CHERRIES IN THE ICEBOX"

This fourth short story is quite separate from the others in the collection: it does not contend with the predicament of the soldier; rather it appraises the writer and his inspiration, intimately and as it impacts on his family. The emotional and physical relationship between man and wife provides the intense subject of "Cherries in the Icebox" (literally "Couples' Days" - *Yamim Zugi'im*).[37] The male protagonist, an adult, married with twin girls, is cast in the persona of writer whose wife has never fully adjusted to his career: "And those compulsive little lies of yours, Tamar said briskly, brusquely, the incessant writing of life, the cunning for its own sake. And, I said languidly, your aversion to my writing; your childish hostility toward me on the days when I have a story." [38] The subtext of this story, piercing through the reflections and inner dialogues, is Grossman's exploration of the artistic process. The couple's marriage, the continued reshaping of two people as they grow and change and reveal themselves within this new structure their life has assumed, is juxtaposed against the representation of emotion and moral soundness within the tale itself.

"Tonight, after we made love, Tamar cried."[39] This awkward, disconsolate beginning is the very manifestation of "words into flesh" that Grossman would return to in Be My Knife.[40] "We love each other, I repeat. No outside force could spoil the movement of this relationship, because we have a kind of incessant love, I continue, etching the words on the soft inner shell of my eyelid."[41] But through the exploration of the unevenness of their relationship, and their individual searching for a sense of self, the story returns to the original aching play of the power of the imagination:

"*Tonight after we made love Tamar cried* – but that's only an imaginary lasso of words I was caught in, that wrung startling seeds of pain from my whole body."[42] A significant part of David Grossman's will to write is dictated by his need to express the intensity of emotion. "Things need to be said, even painful ones." Here as a precursor to his later works (especially Book of Intimate Grammar) he describes his protagonist's constant movement from the world without to the world within himself, to seek a form of expression for his fears: "my diving inside; my slack, circular trawling to the cadence of pain."[43]

The physical manifestation of things, of love in this case, is far less appropriate or comfortable than the soul-searching from within and verbal expression of the experience.

This is the story Grossman has personally selected for inclusion in more than one anthology, both the Oxford Book of Hebrew Short Stories, 1996, and the Oxford Book of Jewish Stories, 1998.[44] This vignette shows him exploring artistic method and inspiration and whether relationships play a part in supporting this or not. It is a short step away from the White Room where the narrator must seek his vision and inspiration alone in Part Two of Grossman's later novel, See under: Love.[45]

"MICHA'EL TSIDON, MICHAEL"

This novella is built around a series of flashbacks in the life and thoughts of a British journalist, Michael Longreen, now living in Haifa as *Micha'el Tsidon*. The events are bordered in the present time of the story by awkward conversations with his inquisitive neighbour, Mrs Merkin, and the unfolding drama of the beloved family dog, Stash, in his final aged moments. The tension of the story arises from

Micha'el's reflections on past real and imagined conversations with his adored son, Yonatan, "who filled the flat with sunshine". The bond between father and son, and their attempts to accept or understand the other's differing viewpoints, especially their conflicting political commitments, is richly explored. The complexity of this relationship animates the work and accounts for its merit and challenge in the new literary standpoint of the writers of the Yom Kippur Generation.

Duality and opposition form the structure of this novella, as is immediately apparent from the title. The first-person narrator, Micha'el, describes his move from his birthplace, the small village outside Oxford in England, to Israel immediately after the Second World War. The portrait of his non-Jewish father, happily ensconced in his narrow parish life, contrasts with the depiction of the young Michael seeking meaning and fulfilment, making this major move to a new and challenging country. The story ends with Micha'el a broken man, living between two realities. Grossman uses this device of dual persona to enter into the post-modern literary framework, to present a story that remains fraught with uncertainty, despite its clear moral assertions.

Differing European experiences act as background for Grossman's first reference to characters who have endured persecution in Europe, and who found their way to Israel as survivors (as Micha'el'*s* sister-in-law Leah did), or arrived prior to the war (as Mr and Mrs Merkin did). The Merkins are presented in an unsympathetic light: Mr Merkin had hoped to make his fortune selling ice, "but the *Hamsin* [hot desert wind] here killed him."[46] Mrs Merkin intrudes into Micha'el's day-to-day life and eavesdrops on his "conversations" with Yonatan. She irritates Michael on every occasion, and is one of the female characters in Grossman's oeuvre that the author paints as untrustworthy.

Micha'el's sister-in-law Leah represents the silent group of survivors that arrived in Israel, damaged and unable to re-adjust to life after the trauma and disease they had suffered. (Her family had been compelled to leave Poland without her, as she lay in hospital in another town.) Once in Israel, she remains silent, wracked with inward struggle, yet incontinent, inarticulate. She is seen by her father as a shameful blight on the family history, and simply untouchable by Malcah, her sister. Malcah's clear rejection of Leah sets up the first doubts Michael has about his wife's good nature. In his major work on the subject of the Holocaust and its impact on both first and second generation survivors in Israeli society, See under: Love, Grossman employs innovative narrative techniques very different from those employed in this story. This vignette is his first brief point of contact with the subject. Here he uses a psychological accuracy within a realistic mode of narration.

Realism is the framework for the ongoing "debate" between Micha'el and Yonatan on the role of the army in the occupied territories. This is the first clear indication we have of David Grossman as a political writer; he experimented with this style in "Donkeys", where the protagonist is a defector from the American war in Vietnam. The Jogger collection focuses primarily on the profile of a soldier rather than the direct political debate. Grossman's earliest novel, Smile of the Lamb (1983), presents a forceful analysis of the soldier's mentality, and the interaction between different elements in Israeli and Arab society. In The Yellow Wind (1987) Grossman moves from the fictional to the factual plane in his unequivocal collection of interviews with Palestinian refugees and Jewish settlers in the West Bank territories. In both these works his engagement with the situation in Israel is courageous, with serious moral implications.

In this novella, too, the moral implications are underlined, as Grossman presents the argument against occupation through the father-protagonist Michael, whilst the case for unquestioning defence of duty and command is presented by the son, Yonatan, a pilot in the Israeli air force. Recognising that the Six Day War has brought about the burden of being a conquering nation, of ruling over people who wish only for their freedom, Yonatan claims that he "hates being an unwelcome ruler. I see their looks and I hear the whispers exactly as you do. I know all this exactly as you do..."[47]

When Micha'el asks, "What about a crude a word such as 'justice'?" the reply is "Justice is a luxury today, in our situation." Justice will be debated heatedly between Uri and Katzman, the two soldiers, in The Smile of the Lamb.[48] Yonatan cannot depart from the tide of beliefs that proliferated at that time. He and his fellow soldiers regard Micha'el as negative and harmful in his attitudes, as an outsider who has not truly been able to understand the situation from within.[49] Yet Yonatan's admissions of sudden panic at times in the cockpit of his plane are understood by his father as simply a step in the process of further closeness between them, not as an ontological indication of real misgiving. Thus Micha'el can only continue to write his bitter newspaper columns in the Jerusalem Post, whilst his ominous fear of the cost of this strategy continues to possess him.

Although broadly taking the same subject that Amos Oz has used in his story "The Way of the Wind", of the relationship between a son in the army and his father, Grossman transforms the father's role from Oz's blindly patriotic one. In "Micha'el Tsidon, Michael" the father is doubtful of the direction of the national policy, whilst the son, although unquestioning in his thoughts, experiences psychological responses of fear and panic. The time-period of the novella is

intersected by the Yom Kippur War, and the approach Grossman brings is one of new questioning and appraisal. The dual nature of Micha'el's personality establishes him as an outsider, and gives him license to be critical of the political policies that arose out of the Six-Day War. He attempts to show this war in the context of the Second World War; he despairs of the barbed-wire fields, the sense of blind "self-conceit". Micha'el invokes the power of biblical allusion, "the New Kingdom of David"[50] with its economic abundance and overweight confidence leading to a dulled vigilance. The author only allows an outsider to question the commitment required to continue living in Israel, in this early work. Grossman promptly presents the counter-argument with Michael's wife, his son and co-soldiers, and his oldest and closest friend, Norman Rozner, pronouncing him "defeatist".

In this story the female protagonists are flat and one-dimensional, mostly unsympathetic. Malcah is dissolute and flippant as a young woman, whilst her earlier attractiveness to Michael declines dramatically with her ageing, and apparent moral indolence. Amiya, their daughter is described as having only "synthetic" beauty, with similar character flaws to her mother. Grossman is not exploring here the dynamic of male-female relationships, and thus demotes the female characters to adroit but simplified sketches serving to buffer the intensity of the main framework. They are swept up into the moral commentary, without a clear voice. The protagonist's intolerance of the female characters leads inevitably to his separation from wife and daughter. In his two most recent works, Be My Knife and Someone to Run With (and now Inside another Person, not included within the scope of this thesis) Grossman does begin to develop the question of femininity and a feminine perspective of love. Relating to nurturing and love, however, milk is

used as connecting metaphor: the life-giving milk the baby Yonatan drinks from his mother's breast and the warm milk Michael attempts but fails to give the dying dog, Stash.

The theme of the dog is powerful. In his latest work, Someone to Run With, Dinka the dog is a vigorous counterfoil to the relationship developing between Assaf and Tamar.[51] Here Stash is adored and cared for by both father and son. His deterioration and inevitable death, as life seeps away from him, form the backdrop of growing sadness against the unpredictable vitality that is Yonatan's life, at the cusp of youth and future promise.

The character of Michael is the most complex in this collection. Identity can be precarious: "Identity is liable to questioning, doubling, splitting or multiplicity."[52] Michael's identity is split by his decision to change his nationality and his name; it is doubled by his complex son-father relationship (in Oxford) and father-son relationship (in Haifa, his real and imagined conversations with Yonatan). He is fragmented by "his tragedy" and by his broken marriage, frozen in a state of impotence.

Micha'el Tsidon remains "man interrupted", disillusioned and disconnected. During the process of the novella he questions the value of his contribution to his family. But his self-evaluation, this Aristotelian *anagnorisis* is left open-ended.

* * * * * * * * * *

In this collection David Grossman explores the paradigms of soldierly experience in Israel. He begins his process of reconfiguring the accepted genres of fiction that will continue throughout his opus, through the characters who he presents. The jogger of the title story is seen as the young Israeli soldier needing to

look for greater understanding of his personal crisis, yet who ends up running away mostly from himself. Grossman pursues other forms of escape and desertion: in "Donkeys" the American deserter has run away from the battlefield, whereas in "Yani on the Mountain" the protagonist has been attempting to hide from life itself. The question of masculinity is juxtaposed against the role of the soldier. And in "Micha'el Sidon, Michael" Grossman expands the prism of self-exploration with the intersecting destinies of father and son.

After these portraits of isolation and despair, after overturning the myths of solidarity and heroism, where does Grossman turn in his later works for his enquiry into narrative identity? Firstly, he looks directly at the panorama of the soldier in society, and Israel's ethical responses and responsibilities in the occupied West Bank towns. The portraits of the soldiers in this collection form the origin for his two army protagonists, Uri and Katzman, in Grossman's following publication, his multi-vocal novel, The Smile of the Lamb. The novel represents the military dilemma of Israel and the harsh toll on all its inhabitants, twenty years after the Six Day War. In his later writing, direct political commentary takes the guise of documentary essay and journalistic reporting on Arab-Israeli scenarios, as in The Yellow Wind, and Sleeping on a Wire. In subsequent novels issues of national war are dramatically cast in the background. For example, Aron, the central figure of The Book of Intimate Grammar, remains determinedly oblivious to the military preparations and the heightened tensions that surround him leading up to the 1967 War.

In his novels he frequently begins with the young boy encountering the adult world. He looks at memory of heritage and background as an important part of

identity. As described by Peter Middleton and Tim Woods this quest involves "the relation of the past to the present, with where the past is and how it persists in our lives, and how it can be experienced or resisted."[53] Grossman uses his innovative work with genre as a structure for this exploration. The following chapters will show how he continues to pursue the complex questions of identity in both the public and the personal domain, by challenging memory, ethical choice, and the narrative one absorbs and tells about oneself.

ENDNOTES

[1] David Grossman, "My Sholem Aleichem", Modern Hebrew Literature, Spring/Summer 1995, 5. The italics here are my own.

[2] Other authors have expressed similar drives in their will-to-write. For example Amos Oz describes with intense love and wonderment his father's library, in Panther in the Basement, translated by Nicholas de Lange (London, 1997).

[3] David Grossman, *Ratz* (The Jogger – stories; in Hebrew) (Israel, 1983). More accurately this is a collection of three stories and two novellas. Hereafter Grossman, Jogger.

[4] Alan Sillitoe, The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner (London, 1959).

[5] Grossman, "The Jogger", in The Jogger, 12. Translations for this story are my own.

[6] Ibid, 18.

[7] Ibid, 45, 46.

[8] Amos Oz, Where the Jackals Howl and Other Stories, translated by Nicholas de Lange and Philip Simpson (London, 1992).

[9] I discuss the role of the city in these two books in Chapter Four, p161 and p186, and in Be My Knife in Chapter Five, p219-220 note 34.

[10] Grossman, "The Jogger", 47.

[11] Grossman, "Donkeys", in The Jogger, 74.

[12] The Vietnam War ran from 1961 – 1975.

[13] Yigal Schwartz, "Hebrew Prose – the Generation After", Modern Hebrew Literature, Fall/Winter 1995, 6-9.

[14] A.B. Yehoshua, "Facing the Forest" in The Continuing Silence of a Poet – the Collected Stories (London, 1988). The characters in the story (first published in Hebrew in 1962) are symbolically

portrayed: the mute young Arab girl is encouraged in (or at least not prevented from) starting a fire by the lethargic Israeli guard, on a land that once was an Arab village, but is now a cultivated forest in the State of Israel.

[15] Grossman's real-life experience is echoed in the film "Good Morning Vietnam", where the radio broadcaster and journalist resists the gloss put on the suffering and killing being endured on both sides in the Vietnam War, and unilaterally decides to overturn the order and style of the news broadcasts. The character of the broadcaster, played by Robin Williams, is summarily dismissed, as was David Grossman. The main thrust of these charges, both in the film and against David Grossman, is that this reporting would undermine the morale and safety of the troupes. Grossman later questioned the morality of these inflexible beliefs and rulings.

[16] See "*David Grossman Poter Mi-'Kol Yisrael*" (David Grossman dismissed from "*Kol Yisrael*") by Leila Galili in *Ha-Aretz* (18-11-1988), and "*Intifada Ba-Radio*" (Intifada on the Radio) by Yosef Cohen in *Kol Ha'IrYerushalayim, (18-11-1988).*

[17] I am referring to the somewhat hypocritical role of Austria, in World War II and just before, when it claimed to be "Hitler's first victim", yet actually ordinary Austrians proved to be on the whole very willing collaborators with the Nazis, especially when it came to rounding up Jews. Hella Pick has analysed Austria's position in Guilty Victim – Austria From the Holocaust to Haider (London, 2000).

[18] I discuss *heteroglossia* as it relates to Grossman's work in Introduction p10 and n29.

[19] Other stories have dealt with the lack of commitment to the demands of army life. "The Way of the Wind", a short story by Amos Oz, explores the conflict between the earlier generation of idealistic and unequivocal Founding Fathers of the Yishuv, and their more sensitive, even frightened, questioning sons. Amos Oz, "The Way of the Wind", in Oz, Where the Jackals Howl and other stories, translated by Nicholas de Lange and Philip Simpson (London, 1992). This collection was first published in English in 1980.

[20] A.B. Yehoshua, "The Last Commander", in Yehoshua, Early in the Summer of 1970, Stories, translated by Pauline Shrier (London 1973).

[21] English quotes are taken from "Yani on the Mountain" translated by Daly Bilu, in Gershon Shaked (editor), Six Israeli Novellas (Boston, 1999); 45, 46. Hereafter Grossman, "Yani".

[22] As discussed in the paragraphs below.

[23] For an explanation of this concept, I have used C.C.W. Taylor, "Politics", in Jonathan Barnes (editor), The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle (Cambridge, 1995), 241-2.

[24] Grossman, "Yani", 37.

[25] Ibid, 124.

[26] Ibid, 118.

[27] Ibid, 97, 123.

[28] Ibid, 52.

[29] A.B. Yehoshua, "Three Days and a Child" in Three Days and a Child, translated by Miriam Arad (London, 1971).

[30] Grossman, "Yani", 69.

[31] Ibid, 47.

[32] Ibid, 121.

[33] Ibid, 45.

[34] Ibid, 114.

[35] Ibid, 119.

[36] Ibid, 125.

[37] This story was translated by Marsha Weinstein, and appears in Glenda Abramson (editor), The Oxford Book of Hebrew Short Stories (Oxford, 1996). Hereafter Grossman, "Cherries".

[38] Ibid, 311.

[39] Ibid, 309

[40] When it appeared in Hebrew in 1998, the original English working title of the book Be My Knife was Words into Flesh.

[41] Grossman, "Cherries", 312

[42] Ibid, 317, italics in text.

[43] Ibid, 311.

[44] This question was raised in my discussion with the editor, Ilan Stavans, at the launch in London of this publication. Ilan Stavans (ed.), The Oxford Book of Jewish Stories (New York, 1998); Glenda Abramson (ed.), The Oxford Book of Hebrew Short Stories (Oxford, 1996).

[45] See Chapter Three, 113-114.

[46] Grossman, "Micha'el Tsidon, Michael", 204. The translations from the Hebrew are my own. Hereafter Grossman, "Michael"

[47] Ibid, 197

[48] See Chapter Two, p74-75

[49] Grossman's opinion as expressed by Micha'el Tsidon echoes the warnings issued by Yeshayahu Leibowitz on the annexations of the occupied territories after the Six Day War; Leibowitz feared such actions would impair the moral character of the Jewish state. Encyclopaedia Judaica, Volume 10, 1588. I deal with Leibowitz's response to Grossman's "The Yellow Wind" in my discussion on that book, in Chapter Two.

[50] Grossman, "Michael", 207.

[51] See Chapter Four, p195 for my discussion of the topic.

[52] Maureen Whitebrook Identity, Narrative and Politics (London, 2001), 45.

[53] Peter Middleton and Tim Woods, Literatures of Memory – History, Time and Space in Postwar Writing (Manchester, 2000), 22.

CHAPTER TWO

The Janus Face of Israeli Self-Image: Literature and Politics in The Smile of the Lamb and The Yellow Wind

"I felt I had to write something about the occupation. I could not understand how an entire nation like mine, an enlightened nation by all accounts, is able to train itself to live as a conqueror without making its own life wretched?"[1] This insight is the link David Grossman draws between the two works discussed in this chapter: his political novel, the Smile of the Lamb, and his political essays, The Yellow Wind.[2]

In Israel, a country whose national identity has been defined in so many ways by the wars it has fought, political fiction characterises major sections of the narrative of Modern Hebrew literature in the 20th century. It links literature to the socio-political history of Israel both before and after its inception – its move towards nationhood, and its continuing struggle for survival within the surrounding Arab world. The burden of living through this history accounts for the complex and uneven life stories of the characters. The political context permeates both fiction and essays: in fiction it features as a silent, dominant protagonist; in essays it serves as an impetus to the discourse on Israel's options and ethical responsibilities.

Four distinct issues need addressing:

- Defining the genre of The Smile of the Lamb as a political fiction.

- The mutually illuminating relationship between this political novel and the political essays.
- Grossman's literary technique of multiple voices as it reflects the shaping of identity.
- The major themes of identity used in these works, which substantiate Grossman's overriding credo calling for rigorous self-examination and recognition of difference in choice and in responsibility.

Finally I consider the response to these works.

The Genre of Political Fiction

The political novel can only be fluidly defined, as the American Jewish author and critic Irving Howe has explained:

> "By a political novel I mean a novel in which political ideas play a dominant role or in which the political milieu is the dominant setting... (the political novel is) the kind in which the *idea* of society, as distinct from the mere unquestioned workings of society, has penetrated the consciousness of the characters in all of its profoundly problematic aspects, so that there is to be observed in their behaviour, and they are themselves often aware of, some coherent political loyalty or ideological identification. They now think in terms of supporting or opposing society as such; and they do so in the name of, and under prompting from, an ideology."[3]

Among the key elements of the political novel are the following:

1. Sense of Community

It is a novel form that deliberately focuses on societal sensibilities; it is located in a particular historical context, and refers to more than only individual or family-centred hopes and aspirations. "If the work is in fact

properly designated a political novel, the determinate goal towards which the various elements tend will have something to do with ideas about community, collective action and the distribution of power."[4] Psychological, political and ethical issues may be separated in the evaluation of character and appraisal of identity in other novel genres. Yet in the political novel, they work together towards a definite goal. That goal, although perhaps not fully realised or acknowledged in the work, will inevitably be seen to underlie the competing narrative codes and issues. As Gordon Milne says, "It is a novel of purpose."[5]

Political concerns have been an intrinsic part of Modern Hebrew writing: "At the very beginning of Zionist ideology, Hebrew fiction was already there and involved in preparing a critique of the hubris of Zionism. The critique was an internal one, conducted in Hebrew with a broad consensus of goals, yet the fact that it took place within the family did not make it any less radical or acrimonious... the founding figure in this truth-telling tradition was Joseph Chaim Brenner."[6] Brenner's purpose was to encourage change through self awareness and conscience.[7] David Patterson appraises Brenner's philosophy and "...the principles which exerted so powerful an appeal. The appeal was all the more compelling once Brenner had died a martyr's death...[8] His strength of personality and absolute integrity impressed themselves upon the hearts and minds of a generation of idealistic youth. He preached a simple but powerful message – responsibility for everyone and at all times; and above all, compassion."[9] Alan Mintz confirms Brenner's enduring contribution: "Brenner was prophetic about the dangers of acting as if man had already been redeemed; the actual consequences of this presumption could only be observed at a remove in time."[10] Brenner's belief in the writer's involvement in society

continues to be reflected in Israeli literature throughout the century, and up to the work of Grossman.

The time-frame of Grossman's novel, The Smile of the Lamb, is the period after the Six Day War of 1967, where the consequences of Jordan's withdrawal from the West Bank, and Egypt's withdrawal from Gaza, simultaneous with Israel's continued presence there, fomented the divide between the Jewish and Arab inhabitants. It changed the nature of Arab-Israeli dispute more noticeably into a conflict, not between nations, but between Palestinian and Israeli communities. For the first time, Israel became an occupying power, with all the moral dilemmas that such a state implies. Israelis of a new generation met for the first time many Palestinians who had fled the war of 1948, and who were now refugees, or descendants of refugees.

Such a confrontation combined aspects of mutual curiosity with understandable suspicion and animosity. Corresponding issues of conquest and governance that overtake the community intrude on any simple national idealism and create havoc with the personal integrity of each character in The Smile of the Lamb. Grossman's insight into the underlying political and social momentum prefigures the first *Intifada*. (The *Intifada* broke out in December 1987. Smile of the Lamb was published in Hebrew in 1983.) His purpose is to help increase understanding and awareness, both individually and within communities, to moderate the divisions created by intolerance and hatred.

2. Political Perspectives

Various standpoints are represented in the novel. As Boyers suggests, "There are always, in the political novel, several points of view in which the

novelist wants us to be interested, even when he deplores most of them. And it is invariably the capacity of a major political novel to do justice to those various points of view that very largely impresses us."[11] Grossman chooses central characters that represent different attitudes to the West Bank territories amongst Israeli and Arab; he develops their historical narratives to show how they arrive at their psychological, political and ethical points of view from within their complex backgrounds. Without there being one position that is characteristic of all political novels, the dominant ethic takes shape as a concomitant of the narrative. In this novel it is achieved through the device of multiple points of view. Grossman fulfils a core criterion of genuine political fiction by representing different points of view and being attentive to them all, without immediately insisting on a central position. Here no single master narrative overrides another. Grossman's major contribution lies in his awareness of the individual and how the situation affects his essential identity: characterisation is built up with insight and depth, stereotypes are shattered.

3. Ethics and Political Writing

There are incontrovertible links between political fiction and ethics: the shaping of identity within a political novel is determined by the protagonists' response to the community, to collective action and to the distribution of power. Michael Keren, in his discussion of the contribution intellectuals and writers have made to the national viewpoint, particularly at times of crisis in Israel, maintains that they ardently guard their "role as social critics devoted to an evaluation of society from a universal, humanistic point of view."[12] This sheds further light on the strong connection between novelist

and political commentator amongst Israeli writers and intelligentsia. In all Grossman's writing, in the broad range of genres he brings into play, his representation of a universal, humanistic point of view is always significant.

Particularly in the novel under discussion, the protagonists' motivation for political action, or action in the public arena, is seen as governed by their inner moral worth. The following quote by Walter Rideout on the novel's function captures the idea of the political novel as embraced by Grossman: "A novel does not send its reader to the barricades or the altar, but rather enlarges his experience, makes him realize more fully the possibilities of the human being. The novel, whatever its formal ideology, is essentially a humanizing force."[13]

In assessing the question of political fiction as genre, Michael Wilding reflects that a political novel is more accurately "the way novelists deal with the issues of society and politics".[14] He emphasises the importance of the tension established at the centre of a political work. The tension in this type of novel arises from the contrasting attitudes of the protagonists towards key issues of relationships, both personal and political. The fundamental moral nature of the characters is scrutinised in the two arenas: "In the context of the general suggestion that states have a moral identity, this is also a clear indication of the understanding that the identity of the nation is coterminous with the identity of its peoples."[15]

By interweaving the first person discourse of the protagonists in the novel The Smile of the Lamb, the panorama of their psychological and ethical responses is presented in order to arrive at political judgements. There is great

emphasis on the choices confronting the individual, and how they impact on their personal and political identities.

Grossman spotlights the power of the political context and how "the situation" holds all its participants as hostages. He questions the patriotic vehemence of political rhetoric, demanding high moral standards and a humanistic understanding at every stage of interaction of his protagonists, in both fiction and non-fiction. In his treatment of the West Bank occupation, Grossman sees above all a need to retrieve a "wide-hearted humanism, to reduce somewhat the hate and the bitterness [as] the real forge of a moral and human code of behaviour."[16] This can be seen as the flesh (fiction) and bones (political essays) of his philosophy, of the need to find a common humanity between all players in the complex panorama of Israel.

This philosophy of humanism has direct sources from within Grossman's texts, and from the wider philosophy of ethics in literature. Above all it is his responsibility as a writer that motivates his work; there is a strong confluence in the beliefs of Grossman and of Albert Camus (who is directly quoted in Grossman's essays) regarding this responsibility: "The service of truth and the service of liberty are the two tasks a writer must fulfil. Whatever our personal weaknesses may be, the nobility of our craft will always be rooted in two commitments, difficult to maintain: the refusal to lie about what one knows and the resistance to oppression."[17] For Camus the novel needs to have an ethical purpose, an end view. The importance of conscience is echoed in Grossman's work, where it is translated into "wide-hearted humanism."

Major literary historians of Modern Hebrew literature of the 20th century have analysed the development of its idealism and ideology. The Hebrew literary establishment contributed to "the formation of the 'Zionist narrative' i.e. the system of symbols and attitudes which the Zionist movement generated, wittingly or unwittingly, in its attempt to mobilize the Jewish population in both the Yishuv (the pre-State Jewish community) and the Diaspora, for actions leading to the creation of a Jewish sovereign state in the ancestral homeland."[18] In the continuing search for role-models – a changing view of identity involving the quest for a new hero-type – the collective myth of the New Hebrew as portrayed in the Zionist meta-narrative was being re-evaluated.

Band signals the factors that lead away from the Zionist meta-plot. "Disenchantment with the myths and ideals of Zionism and declared Israeli public norms was already present in the late 1950s and early 1960s in the works of Oz and Yehoshua in prose".[19] It was not simply the many wars fought by the new state: he claims that "these political markers are inadequate for the task" of tracing the transformation away from the dominant Zionist narrative of pre-Israel Palestine, and towards Israel of the 1950s.[20] To explain the changes, Band turns to the complexity of Israeli life and its sociological developments, the inherited myths and dreams and the harsh realities that counteracted them. Gershon Shaked, as mentioned in the introduction[21], describes David Grossman as legitimate heir to the 1960s generation (Aharon Megged, A.B. Yehoshua and Amos Oz amongst others), to a generation of writers who reappraised and revolutionized the Zionist meta-plot, working "from within the heritage."[22]

The establishment of the Peace Now movement confirmed the interface between literature and politics of the day in Israel. This movement can claim as members Amos Oz, A. B. Yehoshua, Meir Shalev, as well as David Grossman.[23] Their responsibility as writers drew and still draws them to inhabit and understand the interaction between politics and literature as an ethical commitment. Grossman picks up the baton from his predecessors, and contributes an intimate questioning of Israeli identity and its transformation. His work under discussion in this chapter reinforces the power of literature to give meaning to events.[24]

Relationship between Novel and Essays

In his first novel, Smile of the Lamb, Grossman uses the genre of political writing to present a multi-faceted account of the complex Israeli identity. In choosing both Israeli and Arab personas, Grossman validates them all as players, not only in his novel but on the political stage of Israel.

The novel looks at the results and repercussions for those caught up in the occupation of a fictional West Bank Arab town, Juni, and its neighbouring village, Andal. It deals with the anger and confusion, escalating hatred and deteriorating communication between the players. In a theatrical-type exposition Grossman grants each of the characters a voice, as chapter after chapter is spoken in the first person by the core characters. Two of the central protagonists[25] in Smile of the Lamb are Uri Laniado, a young Israeli soldier of Sephardi extraction, innocent of life's manipulations; Katzman, an older more cynical and experienced man, Ashkenazi, nearing his retirement from the army. Grossman will consider their responses to the Occupation from within

their core impulses. The remaining two protagonists are Uri's wife, Shosh, a child-therapist who works with delinquent adolescents; and Khilmi, the elderly Arab maverick, living alone in a cave, sometimes only communicating through a fantastical rhythm of wordlessness.[26]

Khilmi's adoptive son, Yazdi, has been caught up in the Palestinian terrorist response to the Occupation. The book begins up in Khilmi's cave, where he has taken Uri hostage. It progresses with each character evaluating, through flashback and self assessment, how they have landed in the current crisis. By spotlighting each speaker in turn, Grossman refuses to marginalize any of these characters. The exception is Katzman, whose voice is presented in third person. Subtly, by breaking the convention he has created, of giving each character a first person voice, the narrator has distanced this man, who emerges as opportunist and adulterer, conducting an affair with Uri's wife.

The political essays are Grossman's second method of exploring the realities and repercussions of West Bank occupation. The Yellow Wind (*HaZeman HaTsahov)* was written in 1987 after Grossman interviewed residents living in the West Bank territories. He was sent by *Koteret Raishit*, the newly established news weekly, to better understand the complexities of the Occupation. By the time the English translation had been published in 1988 the first Intifada had erupted. How vividly relevant this work has become in 2004 (three years into the second Intifada).

In The Yellow Wind, Grossman focuses on a broad range of characters in this real-life theatre of politics, where he interviews the inhabitants of the West Bank, Arab and Jew alike. He reveals the resolve and inflexibility to the point of fanaticism on both sides of the spectrum. Grossman joins the ranks of

writers who introduce new perspectives; he straddles the divide between the factual and the fictional world, contributing vigorously to both. In choosing both Israeli and Arab personas, Grossman validates them all as players, not only in his novel, but on the political stage of Israel. Grossman fulfils a core criterion of political fiction by representing different points of view and being attentive to them all.

The Smile of the Lamb appeared in Hebrew in 1983, and his collection of essays in 1987. However, the dates of these works in English are reversed, as Alan Mintz observes in his work on the transmission of Israeli literature in America, with the essays appearing first in 1988, and the novel following in 1991. For English readers, therefore, the original perception of Grossman's two works looking at the West Bank territories was quite different: it appeared that the essays laid the groundwork for the novel.[27] But the powerful emphasis on the need for tolerance and understanding in both works is significant – whatever the chronological order of publication, their symbiotic relationship is evident.

Multiple Voices

Grossman uncovers the Janus-face, the duality, of Israeli-Palestinian politics that has engendered a situation of occupation without minimising the tensions for either participant. "The situation is a mint casting human coins with opposite legends imprinted on their two sides."[28] This can be understood to include the many dualities, fragmenting, and splitting of identity that make themselves manifest under extreme circumstances. Maureen Whitbrook offers some insights relevant to this: "Identity is liable to questioning, to doubling,

splitting or multiplicity..." She discusses how certain narratives "support and extend an understanding of the contemporary experience of identity as uncertain or unstable."[29] These circumstances of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the competing Israeli and Arab claims on the land, the uncomfortable personality shifts in those people who govern the territories, result in the direct reference Grossman was making to the persona of freedom-fighter – or terrorist. "The contradicting legends do not change the fact that between them – freedom fighter or terrorist; ours or theirs – can be found the dark, hidden raw material: a murderer."[30]

One example that illustrates the link between Grossman, Amos Oz and A. B. Yehoshua is the device of the first person monologue. This comparison points to Grossman's adaptation and innovation, his daring focus on contemporary problems as they concern identity. The technique of multiple first person narratives has been used in Israeli literature, by A. B. Yehoshua in The Lover (1977), and by Amos Oz in The Black Box (1987), but with a different focus. In contrast to the political engagement of Grossman, Yehoshua considers the multi-faceted social make-up of Israel. He backgrounds the wars and the impact of this male-dominated military world, leading the questions of assertiveness and of transgression of boundary into a more intimate arena.[31] Yehoshua was innovative in re-introducing a coherent and credible Arab character in Israeli literature. He claimed, however, that as the Arab voice became less and less able to be heard in Israeli politics, once any capacity for viewing the Arab as a three-dimensional character had faded (and they were seen increasingly as "the enemy") he could no longer use an Arab as a

legitimate voice in his novels.[32] This would become true for Grossman too: after Smile of the Lamb, his novels include no further Arab protagonists.[33]

Grossman's writing incorporates the Bakhtinian concept of *heteroglossia*. Identity is represented as a conglomerate of multiple voices, from one's heritage (historical background), from the voices heard in one's head (psychological background), and an intermingling, a dialogical discourse, with the author's voice.[34] This last discourse generates the ethical content. Intensifying the force of *heteroglossia*, the narrators' multiple voices are "inter-animated by"[35] the different registers of language which have entered the Hebrew tongue, and the cross-fertilisation of vocabulary from one language into another.

By his very choice of their backgrounds, the author reveals the *heteroglossia* of his protagonists. Katzman is of Ashkenazi origin, and his Hebrew has European overtones; Uri is Sephardi, and not only is his Hebrew different, but his understanding of Arabic operates on a different internal rhythm to Katzman's. "During his six months in Juni he had picked up not only the rudiments of the language but the vagaries of local thought as well. The meaning behind the words. This made it easier for him to communicate with the inhabitants than it was for Uri, despite Uri's fluency in Arabic."[36] But Katzman's view of his own aptitude in Arabic is not borne out – he proves to be authoritarian and inflexible. Khilmi's use of Hebrew most obviously includes a crossover of Arab words and idioms. Khilmi communicates in mystical phrases – "so I carved in water, so I quarried in the wind" and "vegetal sounds". His refrain of "*Kan ya ma ka*" (once upon a time) infiltrates

Uri's speech too, a symbiosis of communication. Katzman issues orders and imperatives in short, sharp sentences. "How convenient military language was for such occasions. Sometimes Katzman felt it was his mother tongue, having lost his Polish and never mastered Hebrew."[37] As transformation occurs within the language, it is reflected by an evolution in the relationship between the protagonists, increasing awareness and intrinsic understanding, or the opposite, perpetuating disharmony.

This contemporary reality of diversity of voice and language in Israel reveals the diversity of ideology, from conciliatory to provocative and fundamentalist. "I have to sever the connections, the circuits of memory, and neutralize the detonators of explosive words", says Uri,[38] ever searching for a way through the hatred and distrust. Khilmi reflects on his bond with his beloved Yazdi: "Twelve years he was mine. What are twelve years? But with every heartbeat we were *tizen fi libas*, like two buttocks in a pair of trousers".[39] Shosh pleads "Listen to me now: I'm waking from a long sleep, and I have discovered that while I was out somebody used me as a battlefield; but who was fighting in me, tell me that. Help me, Abner." She tape-records her thoughts as she tries to decode the damage her recent actions have caused to all who trusted her. There is a glimmer of sympathy for Katzman, but he erodes it with his hardened exterior: "Katzman had never held any clear-cut political views. Politics for him was merely a stage play without any bearing on real life. People involved in politics disgusted him...He assumed his duties like a tough glove protecting him from the inhabitants", says the narrator.[40] A measure of Grossman's sensitivity as a writer is that he can give relevance to the layers of language; this is evident, even in this early novel.

Grossman uses literature as a site for the dialogic interaction of multiple voices, or modes of discourse, each of which is not merely a verbal but a social phenomenon. Nurit Gertz has similarly identified that this "plurality of beliefs and viewpoints" in Grossman's novel and his essays are employed to bring about an outcome of humanistic tolerance.[41] He uses language as the laboratory where politics and literature happen.

Themes of Identity

1. Home

Strong themes illuminate Grossman's inquiry into the construction of identity as it is affected by the occupation and its resonance in everyday life: "Where is home anyway?" asks Uri, as each one of the characters try and retrieve a sense of rootedness and containment from within their situation. It is an existential question that reflects the exilic nature of Jew and Arab, whether by force or by choice, over generations. Grossman updates the meaning of the "*Talush*" (the "Uprooted") as it appeared in the early Hebrew literature of the late 19th and early 20th century of Gnessin and Berdichevsky, Feierberg and Brenner.[42] The concepts of alienation and expulsion are questioned in physical and metaphysical respects. These revolve around the current issue of homeland and national consciousness, of the treatment of residents and response to insubordination in the occupied towns.

This context is highlighted with Uri's own response to the question of "home": "And me, what would I say? Grandfather Amram's shack? Or the little apartment where Shosh and I lived, or maybe her parents' home? Which of them could I blow up without severely injuring myself?"[43] Home for

Khilmi is sometimes a cave, sometimes the hollow of an old terebrinth tree; he is nomadic and peripatetic. Uri and Katzman have different keys for the same apartment, where Shosh lives with Uri, but where she also betrays him with Katzman. Grossman seems to be suggesting that, in a metaphorical sense, these different keys to the same home unlock different chambers of her personality. "And Katzman would answer that he has no home, or... he'd admit that women provide him with a kind of temporary dwelling". With a nod to his own role as writer, Grossman talks about his character Abner, poet and educator, who "would say that home is the empty space between the tip of his pen and the paper."[44]

2. Father-Child Relationships

Central to the development of the characters in The Smile of the Lamb are their relationships with their fathers.[45] Each one in turn struggles with this search for a father figure, and the process reveals the social and historical diversity of the inhabitants of modern-day Israel. The precariousness of identity is clearly manifest in The Smile of the Lamb as the protagonists move from the present to reminiscences and conversations from their recent or distant past.

Katzman's grim childhood experiences in hiding with his father during the Holocaust (a predominantly Ashkenazi experience) leads him to mistrust any sense of home and security. He suffers "the agony of perpetual exile"; he understands the "human condition" in terms of "human dissolution, the erosion of everything human, in all its manifestations."[46] Uri is alienated

from his father, whose hatred for all Arabs following his experience as a POW in Jordan distances him from everyday reality; he offers no support or understanding for Uri's sensitive soul, abandoning Uri to absorb his grandfather's crazy hallucinations, "to suckle at the teat of fear."[47] (Here Grossman seems to be portraying the role of the generation gap in the Sephardi experience). In his vulnerability Uri is lulled into the addictive unguarded comfort of Shosh's parental home. Khilmi's mythical parentage and orphanhood, his perpetual rhythm of adoption and loss (a parable of the Arab in Israel) leads him to the symbiotic cadence of his relationship with Uri.

Uri digs much deeper into his moral core to maintain his integrity, especially towards Khilmi. Uri realises the need to recreate his own identity, "to clear a path through sticky clumps of memory."[48] This is integral to his search for a father-figure. He reaches out to Khilmi at their first meeting, when Khilmi's hysterical conduct is undermined by the other Palestinians in his society. Uri's touch conveys a forceful message, and reflects a philosophy of *praxis*, of effective action, at a time when words cannot cross the huge divide. Later he resolves against the dictates of military decorum to tell Khilmi directly that his beloved Yazdi has been killed.

On an intimate psychological level, Shosh is searching for approval and validation from her father. She distorts the philosophy that is supposed to guide her at The Viktor Frankel Institute, whose aim is to take maladjusted young individuals and help reconstruct and reform their self-worth, their identity. (Here Viktor Frankel as mentor becomes a surrogate father figure.) Rather than enabling her young pupil, Mordy, to learn trust, she betrays his

newly won love, a betrayal that leads to his suicide.[49] Shosh enters a scenario of spiralling deception and betrayal. The question remains: Is she contaminated by Katzman? David Grossman presents female malfunction in a narrower landscape of local environment, in response to the broader masculine breakdown in the political arena.[50]

In his essays Grossman captures those unspoken but profound signs of pain and hatred, of a calming hug, that a father passes on to his son with subconscious significance, in the midst of the most undignified treatment.[51]

3. Education

Adolescence is a theme that takes centre-stage in much of Grossman's work. However, in his first novel, and equally in the political essays, there is no young protagonist articulating this "intimate grammar" of childhood. Rather the author focuses on the theme of children in education: the problems are posed in the form of teacher-pupil relationships, and the question "How are we to educate our children?" reverberates through the works discussed in this chapter. In every society the education of its children, the guiding national and personal ethos that is taught in school and at home, is formative in the practical and spiritual building of identity.

From his discussions with teachers in Palestinian schools, and residents in Jewish settlements, Grossman as interviewer presents the dilemmas. He shows the inexorable progression from

> "children who in '67 sold figs for a *grush*... and afterwards they grew up a little and became the *shabab*, you know... the ones with the look of hate in their eyes, rioting in the streets and throwing stones at our soldiers... and from among them came the ones who make the Molotov

> cocktails and the bombs. They are the same children from '67. Nothing has changed in the refugee camps, and their future is etched on their faces like an ancient, fossilized record."[52]

There is a resounding echo from the work of S. Yizhar. In "*Hirbet Hiza'ah*" the young soldier, watching a caravan of refugees, says: "We also saw how something was happening within the child so that when he would grow up he could not be other than a poisonous serpent, this being who was now nothing but a whimpering, frail child."[53] Grossman notes the difference between Israeli children in kindergarten, boisterous in their freedom, compared to the quiet discipline of the Arab children, controlled and waiting; "like father, like son" quotes the teacher.

In response to the question of educating the next generation (of Israelis), Abner, Shosh's father, says: "We're tearing them apart... we can't go on tearing sensitive young people apart; we can't inspire them with lofty ideals and then order them to kill, even for a just cause... we had no choice, the fighting had been forced on us, and so had the hump that's been on our backs since the June war."[54] This frustration is echoed in the essays: "Like so many others I began to think of that kidney-shaped expanse of land, the West Bank, as an organ transplanted into my body against my wishes..."(Compare the "hump that's been on our backs since the June war".) "Of course that transplanted organ continued to produce antibodies in my consciousness... As long as the present 'fabric of life' continues, it is wrapped around an iron fist of hate and revenge."[55] There is a motif of yearning through all the vignettes "... there must be a way to make this massive friction between Israelis and Palestinians more honourable and tolerable, and minimize the hate as much as possible."[56]

4. The Arab-Israeli Conflict

The theme of Arab-Israeli conflict is presented primarily in the novel as the internal moral struggle each character wages, as a means of confronting the complex issues of tolerance and honesty contiguous to it. This internal conflict has been seen as a theme in Hebrew literature before.

In an intertextual sense Grossman revisits the soldier of S. Yizhar's story "*Hirbet Hiza'ah*", who is distressed by the mixed messages he hears: the patriotic rhetoric of the 1948 war, soldiers storming ahead to conquer towns and villages, against the moral shame of his internal voice reminding him these fleeing Arabs are refugees too. Yizhar confronts the moral dilemmas of the battle against Arab villagers of the town. The internal dialogue is constructed between the narrator/protagonist and his commanding officer. He reflects on his moral misgivings, questioning the entire portrayal of the rights of Israelis and the plight of the fleeing Arabs.

> "...Now it will be clear with how many good and honest hopes were the departing soldiers armed when they received all this "burn-blowup-arrest-load-send-off" that they will arise and burn and blow up and arrest and send off with utmost etiquette and especially with cultured moderation, and this is a sign of refreshing winds, of a good education, and perhaps of the great Jewish soul."[57]

Yizhar's protagonist is wracked with the anxiety of internal emotional insubordination, in a situation where he finds no moral guidance or precedent:

> "I tried to control myself. My insides cried out. Colonists, my insides cried. It's a lie, my insides cried. *Hirbet Hiza'ah* is not ours... What didn't they tell us about refugees? Everything, everything for the sake of the refugees, their welfare and saving them – and of course our

> refugees. Those whom we expel – that is a completely different matter."[58]

Yizhar's protagonist questions the wisdom of the policy and action around him, whilst being unable to rebel entirely against the received wisdom of national policy and military strategy. Or perhaps Yizhar was unwilling to create a protagonist subversive enough. For his part, Uri does respond directly against the dictates of his commander:

> "So we're right and they're right, we're a pretty enlightened occupation, as Katzman always says to me... and I felt I was going to explode, and so in a moment of terrible despair, in a moment of angry compromise with everything, I decided to hell with it, from now on I will listen only to the lucid voice of that hormone in my brain that tells me a great injustice has been committed against these people, and I don't care that they were the ones who started it with their own aggression and their continuing hatred for us, I don't give a damn how enlightened our occupation is, or that there's very little overt violence, both sides have valid claims, so from now on I will move blindly on, because you have to be a little blind, sometimes to get anything done and then I knew what I wanted, I knew myself again."[59]

Katzman is sucked into the inevitability of the conqueror mentality. Here Grossman traces the transformation of Katzman's identity through the narrative he internalises. His personal traits, his "wild and bitter fortitude verging on self-hatred",[60] turn into deception – of others and of himself. The effects of the occupation impact on all participants. Katzman's efforts at normalizing the lives of the Arabs quickly fail. He thinks: "Perhaps there was some way out after all. He would turn 'his' city into a living experiment. The occupation would be humane. With the grace of sincerity and trust – here of all places. Only after he arrived in Juni did he wake up... he was governor of

25,000 people who didn't want him here. And by his efforts to maintain the framework of their daily lives... he had only managed to compound the injustice..."[61] Katzman resists moments of genuine insight and even his desire to save Uri remains selfish and militaristic. "You have to be as crazy as Uri to step out of your life and view it from the outside, to rub your eyes and wonder how such a thing had happened. How we had all been turned into hostages."

Grossman chooses one moment in time and place to reveal the confluence of literature and politics. Literature operates through a softer lens than political journalism, although the reality it depicts can be just as vivid. In The Smile of the Lamb, there is a donkey killed in the crossfire, left to fester and rot until Katzman determines he will get total compliance from the Palestinian residents. Uri finds this one of the hardest duties to fulfill: Grossman uses the donkey firstly as a symbol of innocence. But later it carries the "stench of unconditional truth, more powerful than justice or reason". Uri screams: "It's not enough that they have to see us around them all the time and listen to us and work for us and earn our money and obey our laws, now they have to smell us too, with every breath they take."[62] This image is a metonym for the Occupation.

5. The Need for Dialogue

The powerful concept of the torment of occupation as focal point of the Arab-Israeli conflict stands out: "Uri spoke openly of unmentionable things, saying that the occupation poisons the lives of both our peoples". He declares later: "'Violence is no solution. But you will have to shake us out of our poisoned slumbers. Talk to us', he said, he yelled. 'Eventually someone will

hear you.'"[63] Uri challenges Katzman's wisdom that they're "a pretty enlightened occupation, that we're right and they're right."[64] This idea "Between Right and Right" emerges with greater clarity in the political essays; it is also the title of A. B. Yehoshua's chief interpretation of the years of struggle, as he works towards a moral basis for resolution.[65] Amos Oz adds his response to this question: "Perhaps rather than speak of a clash between 'right and right', it is better to speak of 'claim against claim'. The term 'right', at least in its secular sense, stands for something which is recognized by others, not for something that someone feels very strongly about". He continues to further define "rights" and "claims", with the intention of finding a compromise in this blighted condition of confrontation.[66]

Published in 1983, Amos Oz's collection of essays and speeches, In the Land of Israel, serves as a clear precursor to Grossman's collection. Oz disclaims any pretensions to "representative pictures or typical cross-sections."[67] The moral questions relating to the occupation are explored and discussed. Oz presents his own position regarding the "moral autism" he believes the Israelis adopted after the 1967 War. He upbraids those who maintain the Palestinian-Arabs should live with a status Israelis would never agree to accept for themselves. He deplores the assertion that Palestinians have no identity outside that of the "greater Pan-Arab nation".[68]

Grossman refers directly in his essays to two Western European writers who have espoused ideological responsibility in their work, Albert Camus and George Orwell. They wrote political fiction from within the context of socio-political upheaval and ideological tumult and use the narrative of political events and responses as a comment on the changing shape of identity.

Grossman intersects his essays with references to George Orwell's account "Shooting an Elephant".[69] It is set in colonial Burma, and demonstrates how in situations of occupation the governing power becomes hostage to the situation, and to the very people they are occupying. Orwell as colonial officer perceives "that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys... He becomes a sort of hollow, posing dummy, the conventionalised figure of a *Sahib*... He wears a mask and his face grows to fit it."[70]

Grossman fleshes out the beliefs of Yeshayahu Leibowitz, Orthodox Jew, famous scientist, philosopher and political maverick, who construes the turbulent effects of such political actions on identity: "It is impossible to become occupiers and remain moral. Even people with moral intentions are led slowly into an immoral situation. The situation turns into a sort of monster with a life of its own, which can no longer be controlled. An unjust and unreliable monster."[71] Leibowitz, who had helped formulate the ideology for the Peace Now movement, maintains that after the Six Day War of 1967, Israel had made a decision to turn a war of defence into a war of conquest: "Israel ceased to be the state of the Jewish people and became an apparatus of coercive rule of Jews over another people."[72] There was of course intense reaction to this view, especially at a time of such euphoria in Israel after the 1967 war.

Grossman returns to the questions raised, with a degree of distance, to re-examine their continuing relevance. In The Yellow Wind he is reminded of Leibowitz's words by Raj'a Shehade, the Palestinian lawyer and author who clearly continues to struggle with the challenge "to remain human even under the conditions that prevail" whilst being aware that "the occupation destroys

the fabric of civil and traditional life".[73] He gives a clear sense that both Jew and Arab are transformed, are in a prison under Israeli occupation.[74]

Yet the later chapters of The Yellow Wind are more difficult, both for the author as witness, and for his hope of discerning broad concepts of tolerance and the unequivocal value of life above all else. He doesn't shrink from expressing his feelings, his fears and sublimations, when coming into contact with families of terrorists and with fundamentalists on both sides of the spectrum. His interviews with the father of a Palestinian terrorist seem to echo the fictitious figure of Khilmi, whose son Yazdi is drawn into the terrorist culture and activities. Witnessing the funeral of members of a religious Jewish family killed when their car was blown up leads him to ponder the pain and ultimate cost of occupation and terrorism.

The most trenchant aspect of his writing emphasizes how the essential common passions, hopes and fears are thwarted and convoluted when humanity is disregarded. Grossman later writes about the impact on the identity of a whole generation of young people, brought up under the shadow of homicide bombing in his latest collection of articles Death as a Way of Life, 2003: "A society that becomes accustomed to sending its young men and women on suicide operations aimed at murdering innocent civilians, a society that encourages such actions and glorifies their perpetrators, will pay a price in the future. Its coin will be their attitude toward life itself, life as an inalienable sacred value."[75] In the essay "An Invitation to Dialogue" he continues to call on both sides in the conflict to reassess their approach to resolving the conflict: "Can we meet – yes, even in these times – on the border, both the metaphorical and the concrete demarcation, somewhere between Palestine and

Israel, say, in a peace tent that we erect there together?"[76] In 2003, as the situation became ever more desperate, Grossman's tone in his essays becomes equally desperate: "What I feel like doing now is not writing an article. I actually feel like taking a can of black spray paint and covering every wall in Jerusalem, Gaza, and Ramallah with graffiti: LUNATICS, STOP KILLING AND START TALKING!"[77]

Terry Eagleton discusses how the culture and ideology of nationalism is often generated through literary channels. Literature, he argues, inherits the weighty ethical, ideological and even political tasks which were once entrusted to more technical or practical discourses.[78] He refers to the apparent intrinsic need for conflict to confirm self-definition and identity between adversaries: "All oppositional politics thus move under the sign of irony, knowing themselves ineluctably parasitic on their antagonists."[79] Grossman's essays explore the validity of this in relation to the Israeli situation. "...all of us, Israelis and Palestinians, were born into this conflict, and our identity is formulated, to no small extent, in terms of hostility and fear, survival and death. Sometimes it seems as if Israelis and Palestinians have no clear identities without the conflict, without the "enemy" whose existence is necessary, perhaps critical, to their sense of self and community."[80]

Response

The response to The Yellow Wind was considerable. Writers who had believed themselves capable of full and frank analysis of the panorama of Israeli life praised Grossman's courage in writing this book. Dan Ben Amotz, writing at the same time, claimed "David Grossman hauls me out of my house,

and takes me to places I'd rather not visit. We are all partners in the activity on the West Bank. So with gnashing teeth and flaming cheeks and with insult and fury I wish to thank him."[81] Mahmoud Darwish, a Palestinian poet "published a full Arabic translation in his literary journal Al-Karmel in Ramallah" and described it as "'very important testimony'" that broke ground in Hebrew writing."[82] Grossman's courage lies in presenting life in such troubled times, a present reality recognizable to everyone inhabiting Israel and the West Bank lands. He too is seeking a solution to the polarity and hatred, to the seething undercurrent of violence and distrust.

* * * * * * * * * *

In 1992 Grossman published Sleeping on a Wire, an account of his conversations and debates with Israeli-Arabs, or is it Arab-Israelis, or Palestinians living in Israel, or "48-ers", as the Palestinians in the West Bank territories call them? The simple difficulty of finding the correct designation for these inhabitants of Israel expresses the complexity of establishing their identity and role in Israeli life.

It is a book rich in the anomalies of their lives, and Grossman goes to the nub of the matter. Education is the most daunting challenge. Teachers ponder how to teach children in the Arab schools, in circumstances of "Perfect Paradox: to be loyal citizens of a country that declares itself not their country, but the country of the Jewish people."[83]

The focus in these works shifts from a struggle within society to include the foreigners in their midst. The status of the Arab within the Israeli society and the Palestinian at the gates is the core concern of Grossman, and pivotal to any political resolution. This has become "the sphinx... lying at the

entrance to each of us, demanding that we give a clear answer."[84] But my discussion in this chapter has been on the counterbalance in literature and politics in Grossman's writing, especially as evinced in the situation of the West Bank territories, and not about Arab Israelis within Israel, their tensions and frustrations. For this reason I have been brief about my comments on this insightful collection of essays, Sleeping on a Wire.

* * * * * * * * * *

The treatment of identity and loss through the themes of home, of education, of the father-son bond and of the Occupation reinforces the overwhelming sense of tragedy. It is the Aristotelian sense of human fallacy that is brought to bear on Grossman's work, and on the political situation of the time. "I think the Israeli-Palestinian conflict... is a tragedy in the exact sense of the word. It is a collision between one very powerful claim and another no less powerful. And it is high time for honest people outside the region to conceive of it as a tragedy and not as some Wild-West show, containing 'good guys' and 'bad guys'."[85] This sense of catastrophe is reinforced in Grossman's fictitious account of the tragedy: Khilmi's son dies, Shosh's pupil Mordy dies, and in the end Katzman dies.[86] The artistic resolution of literary plot serves to uncover conflicts not yet resolved – conflicts that make up the real tensions and tragedy underlying the surface meanings of the literary text.

In literature the author can endow each character with an epiphany, a "sudden revelation or perception; an insight into the essence of a thing"[87]. Such a moment draws in all the threads of the narrative and leads to the final outcome. In reality, in politics, there is no simple moment of epiphany. Perhaps that is why these "literary" writers such as Orwell and Camus, Grossman and Oz, are compelled to take up the challenge of defining identity, sometimes even their own. In Grossman's own words: "I am not a journalist – if I had my way, I would lock myself up at home and write only fiction. But the daily reality in which I live surpasses anything I could imagine, and it seeps into my deepest parts. Sometimes writing an article is the only way for me to decipher, to understand, and to survive from day to day."[88]

ENDNOTES

[1] David Grossman, The Yellow Wind, translated by Haim Watzman (London, 1998), 212. Hereafter Grossman, Yellow Wind.

[2] David Grossman, The Smile of the Lamb, translated by Betsy Rosenberg (London, 1991). Hereafter Grossman, Smile of the Lamb

_____, חיוך הגדי *Chiyuch HaGedi* (Tel Aviv, 1983)

_____, Yellow Wind.

_____, הזמן הצהוב *HaZeman HaTsahov* (Tel Aviv, 1987)

[3] Irving Howe, Politics and the Novel (New York, 1957), 16-18.

[4] Robert Boyers, Atrocity and Amnesia – the Political Novel since 1945 (Oxford, 1985), p15. I am grateful to Boyers for both the attempt at clear definition of the political novel and the admission of its pitfalls. Hereafter Boyers, Atrocity.

[5] Gordon Milne, The American Political Novel (Norman, Oklahoma, 1966), p182.

[6] Alan Mintz, Translating Israel – Contemporary Hebrew literature and its Reception in America (Syracuse, 2001), 241. Hereafter Mintz, Translating Israel.

[7] JC Brenner (1881 – 1921) portrayed the contrasting reality between the dreams of escape from an impoverished society in Eastern Europe and the harsh actuality of the struggles in the "Promised Land". He recognised the complete restructuring of identity and belief systems that the new immigrant had to formulate, as pragmatism confronted pioneering idealism.

[8] Brenner was murdered during the Arab Riots of 1921.

[9] David Patterson, Preface to Out of the Depths by Joseph Chaim Brenner, translated by David Patterson (Oxford, 1992), 13-14.

[10] Mintz, Translating Israel, 241.

[11] Boyers, Atrocity, 28.

[12] Michael Keren, The Pen and the Sword – Israeli Intellectuals and the Making of the Nation-State (London, 1989), 91.

[13] Walter Rideout, The Radical Novel in America (Cambridge MA, 1956), 289-290.

[14] Michael Wilding, Social Visions, Series: Sydney Studies in Society and Culture (Sydney, 1993), 164.

[15] Maureen Whitebrook, Identity, Narrative and Politics, (London, Routledge, 2001), 57. Whitbrook is mostly analysing the question from the opposite focus, the construction of narrative identity as a public – and hence potentially political – process. This is further evidenced in her article, "Taking the Narrative Turn – What the novel has to offer political theory", in John Horton and Andrea T Baumeister (eds.), Literature and the Political Imagination (London, Routledge, 1996).

[16] Grossman, Smile of the Lamb, p195.

[17] Albert Camus, Nobel Lecture, 1957.
http://www.nobel.se/literature/laureates/1957/camus-acceptance.html

[18] Arnold Band, "The Impact of Statehood on the Hebrew Literary Imagination: Haim Hazaz and the Zionist Narrative", in D. D. Moore and S. I. Troen (eds.), Divergent Jewish Cultures – Israel and America (Yale, 2001), 256.

[19] Ibid, 273. Band also refers to Aharon Megged's work, The Living on the Dead (in Hebrew *HaHay al Hamet*) 1965, as "the most forceful novelistic attack on the halutzic leadership of the Third Aliyah". Ibid, 262-3.

[20] Arnold Band, "Adumbrations of Israeli 'Identity Crisis' in Hebrew Literature of the 1960s", in Kamal Abdel-Malek and David C. Jacobson (eds.), Israeli and Palestinian Identities in History and Literature (London, 1999), 123-132.

[21] See Introduction, p7 and n13.

[22] Gershon Shaked, Modern Hebrew Fiction, translated by Yael Lotan, ed. by Emily Miller Budick (Bloomington IN, 2000), 231 and 196.

[23] "Peace Now" - the Israeli Peace Movement - was founded in 1978 by 348 reserve officers and soldiers of the Israel Defence Forces. The first and for a long time only mass peace

movement in Israel, "Peace Now" rapidly became the single most important extra-parliamentary force for peace in the country, attracting hundreds of thousands to its mass rallies and activities. "Peace Now" is open to any and all persons dedicated to the struggle for a peaceful, just and lasting end to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the belief that security, human dignity and a promising future can only come through peace.

"Peace Now" had a big boost in late 1982, when up to 400,000 people – reportedly – protested the Lebanon War. Also, "Peace Now" enthusiastically backed the Oslo peace process, after 1993; and the organisation has quite large support groups (Friends of Peace Now) in the Jewish Diaspora, especially in USA, UK and France.

[24] Social and political revolutions have been accompanied and in some cases prefigured by political literature outside of Israel. Particularly in Ireland, the strongest ideas for a national identity and purpose were presented through fiction and poetry. W. B. Yeats's writing is a salient example of this. His poetry raises themes that Grossman will turn to: how intense conflict destroys any balanced acceptance of difference and the intolerance that seeps into public political discourse.

"They must to keep their certainty accuse
All that are different of a base intent;
Pull down established honour; hawk for news" "Leaders of the Crowd" in W.B. Yeats, Selected Poems. Edited and with an Introduction and Notes by Timothy Webb (London, 2000). Yeats' poetry prefigured the collective sense of the politics of the time. Archibald McLeish reinforces this by questioning whether the heroes of the Easter Rising of 1916 were the ones who had transformed the perception of Ireland and the significance of its political issues; or whether "the poem itself, five months after that tragic Easter, gave their deaths their meaning." Archibald MacLeish, Poetry and Experience (London, 1965), 135.

[25] Since Grossman uses four distinct characters as central to the novel, I refer to them all as "protagonists".

[26] Gertz allocates to Khilmi the core beliefs and influence of the novel – whereas I think Grossman spotlights each character in turn. Gertz, Myths in Israeli Culture, 115.

[27] Alan Mintz, Translating Israel, 192.

[28]Grossman, The Yellow Wind, 198.

[29] Maureen Whitebrook, Identity, Narrative and Politics, 45.

[30] Grossman, The Yellow Wind, 198.

[31] A. B. Yehoshua, The Lover, translated from the Hebrew by Philip Simpson (London, 1993). The Hebrew original, המאהב was first published in 1977.

[32] Gila Ramras-Rauch, The Arab in Israeli Literature (Bloomington Indiana, 1989), 147.

[33] The Black Box is an epistolary novel. Oz's focus in this novel is the Ashkenazi and Sephardi interface in Israeli society, and the ostensibly unreliable woman who connects them. Oz does bring internal Israeli politics into play, but the question of Arab-Israeli interaction is not evoked. Despite its multi-vocal construct (and the dimension of a father-son relationship)

this book will be more relevant in a comparison with Grossman's work of epistolary fiction, Be My Knife, שתהיי לי הסכין 1998.

[34] M. M. Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays, edited by Michael Holquist. Translated by Daryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. (Austin, 1998), 428 and 60-65.

[35] Ibid, 64.

[36] Grossman, Smile of the Lamb, 19.

[37] Ibid, 150.

[38] Ibid, 101.

[39] Ibid, 110.

[40] Ibid, 146-8.

[41] Gertz, Myths in Israeli Culture, 116.

[42] Eastern Europe was the physical birthplace of these writers, who left their close-knit yeshiva communities, reaching out for an emancipated commonality of views on Judaism and religion. They invariably left village and country, repulsed by the social and religious conditions. As they travelled through Europe, and oftentimes to the Land of Israel, these writers felt alienated by both their once-familiar background and the unfamiliar country they now adopted.

[43] Grossman, The Smile of the Lamb, 56.

[44] Ibid.

[45] G. Ramras-Rauch discusses the quest for validation from the father-figure in The Arab in Israeli Literature, 189.

[46] Grossman, Smile of the Lamb, 21.

[47] Ibid, 13.

[48] Ibid, 12, 14.

[49] In opposition to Frankel's teachings of logo-therapy, that people are always free to take a stand toward inner conditions and outer circumstances.

[50] The gender issues that arise here become more significant in Grossman's later works, especially his newest work, not yet translated, בגוף אני מבינה , 2002 (Inside Another Person). But this is outside the subject of this dissertation.

[51] Ibid, 168.

[52] Grossman, The Yellow Wind, 19.

[53] S. Yizhar, pen name for Yizhar Smilansky [1916 -], was born in the Land of Israel (during Ottoman rule) and was a member of the Knesset for many years. He reappraises the myths of collectivism embraced by the pioneers and by soldiers in the wars as his troubled individual characters question accepted beliefs. His protagonists are soldiers (as in "Midnight Convoy") and kibbutz members ("Ephraim returns to the Alfalfa") who reflect doubt about the established rhythms and norms of society.

"The Story of Hirbet Hiz'ah", a novella published in 1949, translated from the Hebrew by Harold Levy, in Jacob Sontag (ed.), Caravan – A Jewish Quarterly Omnibus (New York, Thomas Yoseloff, 1962), 330.

[54] Grossman, Smile of the Lamb, 230.

[55] Grossman, Yellow Wind, 212-214.

[56] Ibid, 85.

[57] S. Yizhar, "Hirbet Hiza'ah". English translation quoted from David C Jacobson, "Patriotic Rhetoric and Personal Conscience", in Kamal Abdel-Malek and David C. Jacobson (eds.), Israeli and Palestinian Identities in History and Literature (London, Macmillan, 1999), 115.

[58] Ibid, 116.

[59] Grossman, Smile of the Lamb, 227.

[60] Ibid, 18.

[61] Ibid, 147-148.

[62] Grossman, Smile of the Lamb, 276

[63] Ibid, 114-115.

[64] Ibid, 226.

[65] A. B. Yehoshua, Between Right and Right. Translated by Arnold Schwartz. New York, Doubleday, 1981. *BiZechut HaNormaliyut* (Jerusalem, 1980).

[66] "The case of the Land of Israel, or Palestine, as it stands after almost a century of struggle and upheavals, is roughly as follows: the whole world recognizes Israel's rightful existence in the Land of Israel, but nobody supports an Israeli claim over the whole Land of Israel. At the same time, although everyone supports the Palestinians' right to self-determination in Palestine, there is only marginal support for a Palestinian claim over the whole of Palestine. This situation is a reasonable starting point for a possible compromise". Amos Oz, "The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Tragedy, Comedy and Cognitive Block", essay in Israel, Palestine and Peace (London, 1994), 102.

[67] Amos Oz, In the Land of Israel, translated from the Hebrew by Maurie Goldberg-Bartura (London, 1983), author's introductory note (unpaginated).

[68] Ibid, 142, 147. Oz interviews the people residing in Israel; Grossman goes further than Oz by interviewing the inhabitants of the West Bank Territories.

[69] George Orwell, Shooting an Elephant and other Essays (New York, 1950).

[70] Ibid, 9.

[71] Grossman, The Yellow Wind, 148.

[72] Yeshayahu Leibowitz, Judaism, Human values and the Jewish State, edited by Eliezer Goldman; translated by Eliezer Goldman, Yoram Navon and others (Cambridge Mass., 1992), 243. This article was first published in 1986. Leibowitz writes that "safe boundaries are a reality only where there is true peace between neighbours, as in the case of Holland/Belgium, Sweden/Norway, the United States/Canada. In the absence of peace there is no security, and

no geographic-strategic settlement on the land can change this. There is no direct link between security and the territories."

[73] Shehade is a Palestinian lawyer, practising in Ramallah since 1979, and is a barrister of Lincolns Inn, London. He continues to publish books and articles on law and life in the Occupied Territories.

[74] Grossman, Yellow Wind, 96, 157-8.

[75] David Grossman, Death as a Way of Life – Israel Ten Years after Oslo. Translated by Haim Watzman, edited by Efrat Lev (New York, 2003), "Reality Check, March 2002", 168. Hereafter Grossman, Death as a Way of Life. I have included references from Grossman's recent collection of articles, published 15 years after The Yellow Wind and ardently pertinent to the situation in Israel.

[76] Ibid, "An Invitation to Dialogue", 104.

[77] Ibid, "Deadly Routine", 150.

[78] Terry Eagleton, The Idea of Culture (Oxford, 2000), 40.

[79] Terry Eagleton, Frederic Jameson, Edward Said, Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature (London, 1990).

[80] Grossman, Death as a Way of Life, "Death as a Way of Life", 125

[81] *Koteret Reishit*, 13-05-1987.

[82] "Tunnelling to the Enemy", The Guardian, 29-03-2003.

[83] David Grossman, Sleeping on a Wire – Conversations with Palestinians in Israel. Translated by Haim Watzman (London, 1994), 16. Original publication in Hebrew נוכחים נפקדים *'Nochechim Nifkadim'* (Tel Aviv, 1992).

[84] Grossman, Yellow Wind, 212.

[85] Amos Oz, Israel, Palestine and Peace (London, 1994).

[86] Nurit Gertz shares this sense of despair in the ending of Grossman's novel, and how difficult it is to be extricated from the "impossible political situation". Myths in Israeli Culture, 116.

[87] World Book Dictionary, London, Doubleday, 1985.

[88] Grossman, Death as a Way of Life, "Preface", viii.

CHAPTER THREE

The Phoenix Test of Holocaust Writing

in

See under: Love

"It was a strange tunnel I entered. A tunnel which led from me, an Israeli child at the beginning of the sixties, to that Jewish child in the Diaspora. Between the young State which wanted to forget, because it was determined to put together **a new identity**, and the land of There."[1]

This quotation from an essay by David Grossman reflects the irresistible magnetism he experiences between his present-day world in Israel and the history and background of its inhabitants. See Under: Love is the manifestation of Grossman's compelling need to examine the fragmented world of the Holocaust survivor, and to reappraise the impact and influence of the Holocaust experience on modern-day Israelis, all of whom he ultimately defines as Second Generation survivors. In a metaphorical sense, Grossman used mentors and guides in this journey through "the tunnel" to the original world of Eastern European Jewry. The author acknowledges the major influence of Sholem Aleichem and Bruno Shultz; he conducts a virtual dialogue with them and re-activates their works through his own. Grossman observes and decodes the devastation of the Holocaust experienced by the survivors, assimilating these experiences into a present-day Israeli psyche and identity.

Holocaust Literature is in itself an anomaly: many philosophers and authors, Jewish or not, Israeli and Diaspora, have posited disparate points of view regarding how to treat the facts of the Holocaust as material for a story. From Adorno's claim that "writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" to the clarifying, crushing analyses of Primo Levi, writers have attempted to expose and understand the nature of evil[2]; from the diaries and memorials of survivors to their fictionalised accounting of the horror, and its effects on those who suffered through it, the rest of the world has attained a grim and heavy burden of insight into "*l'univers concentrationaire*".

The "phoenix test" for the modern Israeli author is his journey to find a discourse for the Holocaust experience, to survive the ordeal of rebirth through fire, entering the flames of the concentration camp universe, to gain understanding and redeem future generations from the weight of this trauma. Grossman's narrator Momik presents the Phoenix syndrome: "As happens when forests burn to ashes, here too, the forces of life resurged, and the first green shoots began to appear: families broke up... while new transient families appeared".[3] See under: Love employs innovative narrative and generic techniques to take the reader on such a journey. The disorder and brutality of life and death experiences during the Holocaust, and the complete absence of boundaries between these experiences and contemporary experiences, form the foundation for this novel. Grossman's purpose in this novel is twofold:

1. To resurrect those who lost their lives, through retelling their story and therefore granting them immortality.

2. To show the complexity and impenetrability of telling the Holocaust story, whilst noting its continued overwhelming impact.

Many elements combine to make See under: Love a formidable assault on accepted norms of Holocaust writing in literature. It concerns a young boy growing up in Jerusalem in a neighbourhood surrounded by Holocaust survivors. From his parents and the society around him he inherits a sense of *angst*, which is transformed into his frantic efforts in his necromantic basement to find a method of saving all those so affected by the ravages of the War, to exorcise the "Nazi Beast". In the next sections the protagonist is transported by leaps of the imagination in pursuit of his inspiration, his Muse. He transcends time and place, literally so in Part Two, where he inhabits imaginary seascapes and Holocaust Memorial headquarters. In Part Three he re-enters past configurations of the extermination camps along with a significant cast of characters from his present-day imaginary world. Then in Part Four, the Encyclopaedia, he employs a further experiment in narrative technique, where plot and character are dislocated into a neutral format, whilst still attempting to continue the story.

The structure of turbulence throughout the novel can be confusing, but it also serves to liberate. Through the genre of fantasy the troubled characters can finally revisit their past destiny and return with purpose. In this way they are granted immortality, and they provide future generations with tools of instruction to better understand this formidable, tragic moment in time. There is a wide-ranging shift in narrative mode from realist first person fictional autobiography, in Part One, to magic-realism in Part Two; from the grotesque in Part Three to the apparently "objective" and non-emotional format of an

encyclopaedia in Part Four. Each of these genres is used in deference to the greater significance of the Holocaust novel.

BACKGROUND

The evolution of the Holocaust novel in Israel significantly reflects the attitude to, and the self-awareness of, identity for first and second generation survivors. Looking at the style and impact of the fiction that pre-dates Grossman's novel will shed light on the influences upon his work and on the originality of his own considerable contribution.

In Israel during the first two decades after World War II, fiction relating to the Holocaust was written by survivors. The most significant writer developing at this time was Aharon Appelfeld, (1932-), who represented that shadowy space outside of the camps, where emotional and psychological damage dominated the life of the survivors and their uneven re-entry into the world around them.[4] Other survivors, in contrast, wrote testimonial fiction as in the wrenching fiction of Ka-tzetnik's works, for example House of Dolls (1958) and Atrocity (1977). Ka-tzetnik's writing evokes that "shriek of silence" that David Patterson describes as the essence and overreaching consequence of the Holocaust experience. "The Holocaust novel is not set in one period or another, but in the space between the voices of encounter, in the dialogue between word and word, word and silence, silence and silence...word and meaning may once again find their intersection and their resurrection – in the shriek of silence."[5]

The Eichmann trial in Israel in 1961 had a major impact on the way the man in the street understood the Holocaust. Alan Mintz has discussed the

effects of this event.[6] Following the trial a broader understanding developed amongst Israelis of the long-term damage that permeated the lives of these survivors who succeeded in reaching Israel. Survivor testimony carried its own ethos of authenticity but was kept at a distance from the mainstream of Israeli literature. The writing of people whose childhood experiences had been played out in Europe, although perhaps not directly in the camps, began to be published.[7]

The wars for survival that Israel faced, the Six Day War of 1967 and the Yom Kippur War of 1973 in particular, brought a realisation of Israel's fragility, and a much closer empathy for the assault on their survival that the Jews of the Diaspora had endured. But it was an enormous step to begin to override the accepted Israeli wisdom - that total immersion into life in Israel would repair the psychological wounds of devastation. Amongst native born Israelis there was a sense of denial or at least intolerance of the continuing impact of the Holocaust experience on the everyday life, on the public consciousness. These barriers to understanding were the result in part of the reconstruction of the new image of Jew, of the New Hebrew who bore no resemblance to the Diaspora Jew. In this view, the latter figure had been diminished first by the pogroms of Eastern Europe, and then devastated by the Nazi Holocaust. Tom Segev, discusses the political impact of the Holocaust experience and the rhythm of response within Israel.[8]

Despite the pain still very evident in the lives of survivors, the overwhelming response they garnered in Israel was one of shamefulness, before the trial. Gilead Morahg discusses the tension between the effect of suppression of the Holocaust experience, and working through the trauma by

retelling the tale.[9] He explains that Yoram Kaniuk's novel, Adam Resurrected, which appeared in Hebrew in 1969, is the first to look at the inescapable effects of the Holocaust trauma on individuals attempting to live a "normal" life in modern-day Israel. Although Kaniuk was born in Israel in 1930, his protagonist is a survivor whose accelerating lapses into abnormal behaviour can be explained within the framework of his devastating experiences. The Hebrew title of Kaniuk's novel is *Adam Ben Kelev*, meaning Adam (or A Man) Son of (a) Dog. Kaniuk shows the loss of both form and voice that the survivor endures, resulting in loss of the word itself.

Kaniuk's book was groundbreaking in its use of the grotesque to reveal the complex psychological responses to the guilt and emotional damage of the survivors.

> "For the Holocaust to become accessible to the literary imagination, there is a hushed, mystified piety surrounding the subject which must be broken through. Humour, for Kaniuk, is both the instrument for delivering the initial shock and a technique for rendering the alien familiar; the gap between grandiose delusions and infernal realities constitutes... a universal of human understanding."[10]

Mintz's argument is equally relevant in Grossman's novel, which builds on the breakthrough made by Kaniuk. Kaniuk looks at a new stylistic for telling of the consequences of the Holocaust, as does Grossman, but Grossman takes the story further in looking for a reprieve for those who survived and a reincarnation of those who did not.[11] Essentially the entry anew into the concentration camp universe could begin the process of healing denied by the earlier suppression – both by fellow Israelis ashamed of the recent history and the survivors' self-imposed suppression of bad memories.[12]

This is the enormous breakthrough in Holocaust fiction – the move from the testimonial character of the fiction, from exploring the nature of this evil, to acknowledging the continuing profound impact of the Holocaust experience on the modern Israeli psyche amongst survivor and Sabra alike. This painful recognition is represented in the stories of Savyon Liebrecht, who addresses the dislocation of the survivor, both from everyday Israeli society, and from his/her own family.

Grossman assumed the responsibility of telling the story for several reasons. He was overwhelmed by a sense of loss: the whole of Sholem Aleichem's world and its people, the real individuals it represented, had been decimated by the Nazi machine: "Suddenly it pierced me: the six million, the slain martyrs, those words – they were my people. They were my secret world. The six million were Mottel and Tevye (and Shimele Soroker and Chava and Stempenyu and Lili and Shimek...) Like the pages of a burning book, the *shtetl* crumpled inside me..."[13] The sense of bereavement was extended once he became acquainted with the writings of Bruno Schulz, and with the facts of his untimely death. He felt the need to avenge Schulz's insane murder by writing his story, by extending to him an immortal life. (Schulz was shot in cold blood by a resentful Gestapo officer, in November 1942.)

In each of his novel's four sections the author employs a different means of recounting this vast composite story of those affected by the Holocaust. He works diachronically and synchronically to expose its complexity; and develops and probes the self-awareness of the protagonists at each level. The combination of genres results in a multi-faceted novel,

resistant to simple categorisation and reflecting the difficulty of portraying the Holocaust in fiction. Argues Patterson:

> "The Holocaust novel is not primarily an attempt to recount the details of a particular occurrence, to depict a reality that transcends the imagination, or to describe a horror inaccessible to a limited language. It is, rather, an event and an endeavour to fetch the word from the silence of exile and restore it to its meaning; it is an attempt to resurrect the dead soul or self of the human being."[14]

Within this broad concept of Holocaust novel, fantasy is often used to attempt to access the word "from the silence of exile and restore it to its meaning". Particularly in See under: Love, writing the story provides the code for understanding, as Grossman moves from one narrative mode to the next.

This is a novel which operates on a formidable number of narrative layers. Its multi-facetted compositions could be analysed through different literary prisms. From the point of view of genre and the focus on searching for identity, it needs to be understood first and foremost as a Holocaust novel. Within this framework it can be discussed as a fantastic novel, embracing the parameters of this literary mode.

THE GENRE OF FANTASY

In seeking a working definition of fantasy, I turn to Kathryn Hume: "Fantasy is any departure from consensus reality, an impulse native to literature and manifested in innumerable variations, from monster to metaphor." This factor of "departure" is pivotal in its sense of dislocation: "Fantasy challenges our assumptions about many important issues: the nature of the universe and man's place therein; *mortality, morality, corporeal limitation, space/time limitation, physical confinement to one sex and one*

body... The power of the fantasy increases if it offers us something genuinely new and compelling."[15]

Gilead Morahg, refining the concept of fantasy from the arguments of Todorov and those critics who have taken up the issue subsequently, adds:

> "The fantastic is defined by the antinomy of a simultaneous presence in the text of two conflicting, and mutually exclusive, discursive codes: the 'realistic', or rational, code of nature, and the 'unrealistic', irrational, code of the supernatural – or perhaps more precisely, the unnatural... The fantastic achieves both its defining structure and its narrative effects by projecting a wholly convincing realistic world and then injecting it with unnatural, or supernatural, phenomena."[16]

Neil Cornwall reinforces the continuing paradoxical relationship between fantasy and mimesis: "Fantasy re-combines and inverts the real, but it does not escape it: it exists in a parasitical or symbiotic relation to the real. The fantastic cannot exist independently of that 'real' world *which it seems to find so frustratingly finite.*"[17]

In discussing more specifically each section of the novel, I will focus on these elements of dislocation. The considerable shifts in the narrative structure mirror the transformations of the characters' experience and their psychological upheaval. Their dislocation within the plot is an authentic 'dis-location' (meaning in scientific terms "an imperfection in the crystal structure of a metal or other solid resulting from the absence of an atom in one or more layers of a crystal" or more commonly "to disturb or put out of place").[18] The characters of the novel experience disturbance as a result of loss that they have suffered, and the destruction of the core factors of normal human nurturing and relationships.

It is possible to access an additional genre when examining this book: Beginning with a child's urgent grasping for understanding, and ending with

an encyclopaedic format for the Holocaust story, Grossman builds an extraordinary novel of education, a *Bildungsroman* which unravels the accepted genre of *Bildungsroman*. All the elements are in place: the young boy grappling for enlightenment, the parents and mentors trying to impart their understanding, even the "textbook" with encyclopaedic entries and annotations. Momik's continuing search for lost identity does permeate the novel's every section. Yet it is a story with no expectation of rational understanding. Perhaps it is true to say that all Grossman's fiction deals with a process of education, of learning to understand and live with the world as it is. For this reason I will not focus exclusively on the *Bildungsroman* in See under: Love here, but rather I will concentrate on Grossman's use of the genre of fantasy.[19] In particular, I will consider the manner in which magical realism, the grotesque and the carnivalesque fall under its rubric and are subsumed into it.

As in a musical composition of "Variations", an original work is created out of existing rhythms, sometimes familiar and sometimes awaiting interpretation and discovery. Grossman alludes to a cache of both writers and their fictional characters. In a system of references, he introduces and converses with those authors that have most influenced him. He discusses primary sources of inspiration in his article "Books That Have Read Me".[20]

PART ONE

When he was eight, Grossman received a gift from his father of Sholem Aleichem's work, Adventures of Mottel the Cantor's Son. He later admitted that it had pierced his very soul with its vision of another world, a

new/old world. Sholem Aleichem's book revealed his father's background; it offered an insight into the life of a particular young boy, whose story was poignantly similar to that of his father's; and it provided a panorama of *shtetl* life, of the Jewish world that existed in Eastern Europe before the Holocaust. Most significantly, it conferred on the young Grossman a sense of storytelling; it clothed him in the richness of Sholem Aleichem's art. Sholem Aleichem turns to times of disruption and turmoil in the life of the young protagonist and his world. By presenting this world view as focalised through the child narrator, Sholem Aleichem explores not only the perceptions and development of the youthful Mottel, but reveals the adult world as fraught with imperfections and contradictions, a social environment that's unkind and unforgiving.

This combination of ironic humour with the anticipation of imminent disaster and a subtle psychological portrait of man's foibles and idiosyncrasies seeped into Grossman's skin. When he was driven to confront the issues of Holocaust writing, he adopted this model of story-telling for Part One – "Momik". The author displays his virtuosity in dialogic technique, expanding Sholem Aleichem's style of interlocution, of interaction with the voices in one's head, and refined this technique into creating a composite, complex character. The discourse of the novel works by an accumulation of conversations, involving different personas in each section.

Grossman's technique further complies with the dialogic imagination of Bakhtin, the Russian formalist critic. He does so by representing each section, in its different narrative mode, as an internal dialogue between the protagonist Momik and the character inhabiting his head, or his zone of

inspiration, at the time.[21] Grossman presents interior monologue in an innovative way, illustrating the psychological impact, particularly on a young child, of the opinions, pronouncements and beliefs that comprise the voices in one's head, resulting in frequent misinterpretation of intended meanings. In this story Momik's parents, his primary source of influence, are both survivors of the Holocaust. They live in a neighbourhood of Jerusalem where many of the other residents carry with them their devastating experiences of dislocation and persecution from the Second World War. Many of the neighbourhood residents have never been able to confront the burden they carry from their wartime trauma, from their memories of events during their time "over there".

A large measure of the power of this section is the echo in the young Momik's head of his parents' obsessions and paranoia:

> "Supper... This is when it starts getting dangerous. Mama and Papa chew with all their might. They sweat and their eyes bulge out of their heads and Momik pretends to be eating while he watches them carefully... He only tastes what's on the tip of his fork, but it sticks in his throat because he's so nervous. This is just how it is – his parents have to eat a lot of food every night to make them strong. Once they escaped from death, but it isn't going to let them get away a second time, that's for sure... They won't get angry with him for doing things like this at supper, he knows, because they're not paying any attention to him....G-d have mercy on them, in Yiddish too, Do something to me instead and have mercy on their little bones, as Mama always says about him."[22]

Naomi Sokoloff has discussed Part One of See under: Love, underlining the author's exploration of concepts and influences as they impinge on the sensibility of the young mind. By emphasising the fact that the

child's voice is necessarily the construct of an adult narrator, Sokoloff discusses the process of oscillating perspectives. She sees this illustrated in the dynamic interaction between mature and immature voices, and the search the child conducts for his own authentic and personal voice.[23] Grossman's sensitivity towards that moment in childhood when the young person begins to question and evaluate, to be suspicious of conventional wisdom and advice, is a striking feature of many of his novels. The same is true also in this case. He is able to represent this child narrator with authenticity and compassion. This psychological authenticity exposes the contrast between youth's inquiring, if perhaps misguided, enthusiasm, and all the frailties of an adult psychology, distorted and wounded by the trauma of the Holocaust experience(s).

The protagonist's name, both as he thinks of himself and as others address him, changes through the course of the work, indicating this shift of perspective of the Teller and Tale. It is as "Momik" that we are first introduced to the character. Grossman has indicated this choice was a distillation of two names: "Mottel" from Adventures of Mottel the Cantor's Son, and "Elik" from Moshe Shamir's young protagonist in "With His Own Hands: the Story of Elik" (1951).[24] Mottel is a precocious and questioning boy, orphaned young, who suffers the trials of prejudice, loss, and the turbulence of emigration through many hostile countries en route to America. Elik, like Uri, his adult alter-ego in Shamir's He Walked in the Fields (1958), is strong, courageous and resilient, the epitome of the New Hebrew Sabra, born in a modern independent country, free of ghetto influence or weakness. This character was the stereotypical Israeli answer to the frail, damaged survivor emerging from the pogroms of Eastern Europe, or the aftermath of

the Holocaust. By his very nickname Momik is the assimilation of two archetypes from the collective consciousness of Israel. Early on in the novel, the narrator adds to this:

> "His full name, it should be mentioned, was Shlomo Efraim Neuman, in So-and-So's memory. They'd have liked to give him a hundred names. Grandma Henny did it all the time. She would call him Mordechai Leibeleh, and Shepseleh and Mendel and Anshel and Shulam and Chumak, and Shlomo Haim, and that's how Momik got to know who they all were, Mendel who ran off to Russia to be a communist *nebuch*[25], and disappeared, and Shulam the Yiddishist who sailed for America and the ship sank, and Isser who played the violin and died with the Nazis, may-their-name-be-blotted-out, and tiny Leibeleh and Shepseleh there was no more room for at the table, the family was so big by then, and Grandma Henny's father told them to eat like the gentry, and they believed him and ate on the floor under the table, and Shlomo Haim grew up to be a sports champion and Anshel Efraim wrote the saddest loveliest poems and then he went to live in Warsaw and became a Hebrew writer *nebuch*, and they all met their end with the Nazis, may-their-name-be-blotted-out, one fine day they closed in on the *shtetl* and gathered everyone together by the river—aiii, little Leibeleh and Shepseleh, forever laughing under the table, and Shlomo Haim who was half paralysed and recovered by a miracle and became a Samson the Hero, forever flexing his muscles at the Jewish Olympics with the Prut River in the background, and little Anshel, the delicate one, they wondered how he would ever get through the winter, and they put hot bricks under his bed at night so he wouldn't freeze, there he sits in his sailor suit with his hair parted in the middle looking so serious with his big eyeglasses; 'Goodness me', Grandma clapped her hands, 'you look just like him.'"[26]

As a response to the inordinate loss suffered by his family, Momik perpetuates their memory through his name, and is thereby vested with tremendous hope and responsibility. His name thus embodies this Bakhtinian vision of psychological complexity. The discourse, in this case the interior monologue, is a compendium of all those who Momik hears talking to him and around him and his internal responses to those voices. In further sections of

the book, Momik is called "Shlomik", a Hebrew term of endearment, by Ayala, his mistress; the sea addresses him directly as "Neuman" in Part Two, as he journeys to find a connection with Bruno, his Muse. "Neuman" or "new man" is a loaded designation associated with the concept of the New Hebrew that the new settlers in Israel were hoping to embody. It ties in to Nietzsche's concept of New Man that conflates both the philosophical hopes of those building up the Land of Israel, and the destructive Aryan propaganda of the Nazi machine.[27]

And Bruno, incarnated as the author/salmon/spirit of Part Two, speaks to "Shloma" (perhaps this is the Slavic form of the name Shlomik). Wasserman uses "Shleimeleh", a Yiddish sign of affection, when they communicate with one another in Part Three. By this device of the protagonist's evolving name he continues to span the whole range of Jewish storytelling, in order to tell the universal Jewish tale of persecution, of ironic forbearance, of courageous if desperate battle, and ultimately of the need for love and humanity to overcome the trauma.

Part One is a story, the only section that can be recognised as having a traditional format, with natural progression in time. The action takes place over the five months when Momik, age eight-and-a half, is stirred by the unusual arrival of a "new grandfather", Grandpa Anshel Wasserman. He begins to confront and question the extraordinary experiences he overhears, the eccentric reactions he witnesses, from all those in his immediate environment who have been in contact with the "Land of Over There" – *Eretz Sham*. This section in part prefigures Grossman's next work, The Book of Intimate Grammar, as an exploration of a young man's process of growing up

and the conspiracy of inner turmoil and physical sabotage which assails the young adolescent. This work shows Momik's struggle for insight and understanding in a world that seems dislocated and unfathomable. He seeks to apprehend the nature of the universe and man's place in it.

Novels that use a child as narrator typically feature perceptions that a child internalises before he can fully understand them. Grossman presents such perceptions with sensitive humour. It is Grossman's system of alleviating the horror of his story that accounts for this section being the most compassionate of the four. The author enters into the essence of a child's encounters and experiences, questions and misunderstandings. The realness of the pain, felt in the small details of suppression, struck a strong chord with his readers.

The section quoted above on the origin of Momik's name illustrates Grossman's original use of language. Each of the different characters Momik encounters has an individual style of speaking, and these different registers are incorporated into the young Momik's consciousness.[28] The narrator in See under: Love, Momik, uses diverse levels of Hebrew including colloquialisms, many foreign Yiddish and Polish words, and particularly sentence constructions that have been carried over and assimilated into the language of the immigrant Israelis. All this linguistic tumult cumulates in Momik's giddy imagination as he tries to compile a panorama of his heritage. There is the curse associated with every mention of the word "Nazis" – "may-their-name-be-blotted-out". The Polish retort "*pshakrev*" accompanies the word "Arab" or any other threatening stereotype, on every occasion. Young Momik's attempt to reconstruct a total picture, rational and even scientific, accounts for his

explanatory phrases: "his full name, *it should be mentioned*..." and "because this is war, and *in war we use everything we have*."(The italics are mine.) The impossibility of any clear rational approach overwhelms the young protagonist. The resultant sense of frustration he feels adds to the intensity of this section. [29]

Momik adopts the role of spy supreme in his attempt to "find the Beast and tame it and make it good, and persuade it to change its ways and stop torturing people, and its been about a month now, ... that Momik has been busy up to his ears, in complete secrecy, down in the small dark cellar, under the house, raising the Nazi Beast".[30] In order to conduct his frantic schemes, Momik develops a personal semiotic system that nourishes his purpose yet increases his isolation. He begins to codify. This use of cryptogram plays a pivotal part in each of Grossman's works involving pre-adolescent youngsters, most essentially in The Book of Intimate Grammar, but also in the Zigzag Kid and Duel.

In this instance, Momik's secret code begins with developing an ingenious system of counting out words by the number of fistfuls: "Not every word though, every word, what, is he crazy? Only words with a certain ring to them, if he hears that kind of word, his fingers start running up and down as if they were playing the piano, and they count at *Super Mystère* speed as if they were jet-propelled and could break the sound barrier."[31] The reference to "*Super Mystère*" locates the incident in time to the mid-1950s, when Israel acquired these modern fighter planes from France; and from a psychological perspective, the charming child-view illogic of an "objective" mystical counting system works alongside the subjective sound of which words qualify.

Yet on a more serious level, Momik's dysfunctional approach is a reflection of, or the only way to cope with, a challenge on the magnitude of the Holocaust. He builds an entire vocabulary for himself that plays little part in the modern-day Israel his colleagues at school seem to inhabit. Grossman seems to suggest that – due to Israel's social code *vis-à-vis* the Holocaust – virtually each second generation sufferer suffered in isolation, unaware that many others shared identical problems. Codes and secret games all relate to Momik's search to grasp at identity and reflect his isolation, which in turn allows him to be sympathetic to the troubled survivors.

From the eccentric band of old misfits who meet up in the neighbourhood street with his Grandpa Anshel and endlessly recount episodes from their past "never stopping or listening to each other", Momik understands they are speaking "the language of Over There, the top-secret codes and passwords, recklessly, brashly... ach, and Momik swallows hard and remembers it all, for this kind of thing he has an excellent mind, a real *alter kopf* head..."[32] There is dialogic interplay between two worlds, the Hebrew of modern Israel, and the language of the Diaspora that came along with the survivors. Momik shows how difficult it was for the two languages to meet. As his cryptic plans become ever more intense and personal, they lead to his further distance from the normality around him. The nature of conventional reality is questioned, when the social environment is filled with complex and distraught individuals, grappling with their demons. Normality is a frenzied fight for survival.

Momik finds solace in the written word that he cannot locate in the world around him. Language as escape is a theme used frequently in

Grossman's work, particularly in The Book of Intimate Grammar. Momik decides the "IMPORTANT DECISION!!!" to become a writer like Grandfather, "the only one thing worth being in life". At this time Momik feels he has "this gift, a gift for all kinds of languages no-one understands". He aims to crack Grandfather's code, "this prophet in reverse who tells what used to be". He needs to decode too the strange behaviour of all the people around him: Mr Munin in his search for happiness, and Hannah Zietrin, seemingly reduced to part woman/ part witch. And he will translate his father's unwieldy silences, "Translator of the royal realm. He can even translate nothing into something."[33] This is another instance of the fantastical or magical.

The natural language of the novel, Bakhtin claims, is a polyglot one, representing the process of active, mutual cause-and-effect and inter-illumination.[34] In See under: Love, Grossman shows how the language used by the older generation, the different registers of the older hybrid Hebrew speckled with Yiddish sayings and curses, juxtaposed against Momik's exact and meticulous language, displays much of the miscomprehension of the different generations. Momik's determination to "crack this code" increases his inner chaos as he shifts from one unfathomable disintegrating world order to another.[35]

Telling of Momik's craving for books, whilst his parents will only buy special discount offers of the *Hebrew Encyclopaedia,* Grossman first introduces and signals for the reader the concept of objective encyclopaedic information, which he uses to great narrative effect in Part Four. "There seemed to be an awful lot of things the *Encyclopaedia* was trying to ignore, as if they didn't exist, some of the most interesting things of all in fact, like the

thing Mr. Munin has been talking about more and more lately, 'happiness', the *Encyclopaedia* doesn't even mention it, or maybe there's some good reason for this because usually it's very very smart."[36] This reflects a child's literal mind, where there is no distinction between facts and abstractions. In this instance, it is a poignant observation.

Momik's search for understanding in language, his decision to write, to tell the story, only increases his isolation. An intertext about another archetypal story emerges. Reference to "Jews in Egypt on the eve of Passover"[37] has a broader significance than simply "eating very very fast", which is the meaning Momik construes. The *Hagadah* is the archetypal example of telling and retelling a tale of great significance to the Jewish people, embedded in Jewish culture and tradition year after year. Grossman is indicating that the story of the Holocaust equally needs to be told and retold from generation to generation, and needs to be understood, as the Hagadah challenges, "as if you yourself went out from Egypt". In addition the Hagadah ritualises – and arguably "makes sense of" – past sufferings; but no such ritualisation existed for individuals like Momik, certainly not then, in mid-1950s Israel. This facilitates the leap of fantasy whereby Momik will enter the camps with Grandfather Anshel in Part Three.

Momik's failure to crack the code of the "Nazi Beast" and his distraught epiphany in the basement cellar signifies the breakdown of this narrative. The child's world view of understanding by frantic and intuitive guesswork ends dismally. Momik is silenced at this stage of his inquiry by being sent off to boarding school, where he'll enjoy "fresh air and healthy food".[38] The sense of irresolution he feels in this instance reflects the broader

failures of Israeli society to articulate or address the Holocaust legacy properly. The searing memory of the horror, though, remains "unfinished business", both in individual lives and for the psyche of the nation as a whole. The symbolism is clear: whilst Momik is being sent away to be re-formed into a New Hebrew and with no-one able to take care of Grandpa Anshel, the loss is repeated, his grandfather and his story "disappear like that".[39]

PART TWO

See Under: Love is a book about a Lost Story, about many lost stories that must be retrieved and retold. Having recognised this, the protagonist moves through the different narratives of Parts One to Four to gather the fragmented identity and connect the shards of the worlds that had fallen apart, restoring dignity and perhaps humanity. This section uses fantasy in most senses of dislocation discussed above. To achieve his effects Grossman uses the art of magic realism where, in the words of David Lodge, "marvellous and impossible events occur in what otherwise purports to be a realistic narrative."[40]

As he had done with Sholem Aleichem, Grossman wished to retrieve the man Bruno Schultz and his work. Not only does he acknowledge the immense inspiration he found in the stories by this author, he yearns for a means to reincarnate the man himself, an author arbitrarily and cruelly cut down in his prime. Most of Part Two – "Bruno" – is an exposition of this need. Here, too, Grossman defers to authors and artists he credits with powerful value and influence in the conspiracy of language and body code that constitute Art: Munch, Kafka and Proust, amongst others.

Three motifs link this section to the book as a whole:[41] Firstly, the ongoing impact of the Holocaust experience on the survivors and on the continuing generations in Israel. This belief resonates through to the second motif, the pain and importance of writing, and the need to find both the rhythm (Grandpa's "humming" of his story tune is one of the catalysts of this process) and the code, the source and authenticity of this savage tale. Only through a grasp of the experience and its influence can one be reconciled to a belief in humanity, which links to the third motif, the struggle to go on living "once you know". Grossman opens up the question of loving, and of education about loving, in Part Two.

In this section the concept of code is given a broader significance, when Bruno refers to the "Genetic Code" intrinsic to individual identity. Beginning earlier with the numbers tattooed onto Grandpa Anshel's arm, Momik is lead to wonder if "maybe the number wasn't written from the outside but from the inside, and that convinced him more that ever that there was somebody there inside Grandfather."[42] He scours all the types of codes he knows, safe combinations, *Gematria*[43] and the numerical values of the alphabet, in order to access the hidden story "inside" his grandfather. Momik knows there is a secret that is being hidden, but in his child's mind, does not understand why. Bruno distils the essence of his aims for the human condition, his appraisal of the genetic code:

> "'even death will belong to man, and when a person wishes to die, he will only have to whisper his body code to his soul, which will know how to dismantle the person's unique existence, the secret of the individual's authentic essence, and there will be no more mass death, Shloma, just as there will be no more mass life!' ... that was the

> essence of his story, Shloma, you forget it and you have to recall it afresh every time!"[44]

There is the notion of forgetting and reminding oneself, in a Sysiphean cycle; and again, it mirrors the ritual of the *Pesach Seder*.

Much of Part Two represents a re-evaluation of Bruno Schulz's artistic contribution. The true story of his creative ability and his death were a source of inspiration for Grossman. This is intertext writ large:

> "Then one night... I woke out of a sound sleep and knew for certain that Bruno had not been murdered in the Drohobycz Ghetto in 1942. He had escaped. When I say 'escaped', I don't mean it in the usual sense of the word but, in the special sense Bruno might have given a word like 'pensioner', signifying someone who crosses the prescribed and generally accepted borders and brings himself into the magnetic field of a different dimension of existence, travelling light... Whenever I finished copying some passage, my pen would jiggle around a few more times and litter the page with a line or two of my own – though how shall I put it – in Bruno's voice, by straining to hear him, having clearly perceived his desperate need to express himself, now that he was deprived of his writing hand. How well I understand the agony, the affliction of a writer in exile like him. I mean 'exile' in a very broad sense, and I, as you know, proffered my hand and my pen."[45]
> (Momik offers to be the "ghost writer" in an almost literal sense.)

Grossman explores the process of inspiration, of writing, the ontological fact of being a writer. He steps right into Bruno's texts, and enters into a dialogue with his characters. Here "Shloma", using the name Bruno bestows on him, can learn first-hand what Bruno's intentions are in his texts. Not only does Grossman take this step of creating a magical world where Bruno is metamorphosised into a fish, but Shloma can converse with him as he finds "Bruno galloping backward and forward in 'time' as well".[46] This is the clear dislocation and transformation of corporeal and physical confinement, and of the space/time limitation.

There's a duality in Bruno's death: he is shot in cold blood, but he also pursues a chosen route in the story, to death and re-incarnation. He begins to look like a fish even before he leaps into the sea – representing, it seems, the dislocation of mortality. Despite what follows, the narrator underlines the tragedy of this bereavement: "The whole world must have felt a pang as Bruno lowered himself into the water. Indians along the Orinoco stopped chopping rubber trees for a moment to listen. The shepherds of the Australian Fire Tribe stood suddenly still, and cocked their heads when they heard that distant sound. I did too, and I wasn't even born yet."[47] This quote calls into question the potency of one individual's tragedy in a universe that normally, callously, ignores individual suffering. "That distant sound" is the horror of the Holocaust in all its extremes; its impact would reverberate to the next generations.

The technique of using salmon in a flight of magical realism is one of the enigmas of this section.[48] The salmon's ability to intuit its movements based on magnetic fields of the earth and currents of the ocean lends new power to the dematerialised Bruno. He can travel the entire world yet find his way home; stripped of physical constraints he finds the kernel of existence, a form of transmigration of souls to a place where all that's left is language. Yet he finds not a peaceful utopia, but rather "the beating of the big drum at the foundations, the feverish, despairing embrace of savage tongues and putrefying grammars", where he would understand "the 'pulse of humanity' and the 'sorrows of life'". As a "genuine writer", he is unable to "pretend in writing"[49], a legacy Bruno passes on to Shloma.

Bruno reinforces the need to re-invent expression in order to salvage the Story: "A new grammar and a new calligraphy had first to be invented... Creation in the fullest sense of the word. In all its splendor. Oh Shloma, this is the Age of Genius we've always dreamed of, ...you too will come to understand that the thousands of years of existence that preceded this were only drafts, the tentative, early gropings of evolution..."

Whilst tracing the route to the source and purpose of creation, Shloma pleads for conventional structures: "Some of us actually need an orderly framework." The dispute lies between the weight of memory (a sense of the past) and the weightlessness of moments where "people without memory, firsthand souls, who in order to continue to exist must re-create language and love and each coming moment anew."[50]

The protagonist, Shloma or Momik, steps out of the magic-realist fiction into a report on his current life and the state of his relationships in Part Two. Here the onslaught of survivor-response carried through the generations is exposed. Even as an adult, Momik continues to feel profoundly that every day must be a preparation for war. This is the significant discipline he would teach his child: "if ever I had a child, the first thing I would do in the morning would be to slap his face. Just like that. So he'll know there's no justice in this world, only strife". He continues to explain how little he can relate to the nonchalance of those "who never knew danger"; he finds it hard to fathom their ease in nurturing and loving. He feels the need to be guarded at all times, that ultimately he'll have to choose between "a living son" and "a loving son".[51] He will come to apologise to this young son "forgive everything... because I don't have the strength, they didn't teach me how to love".

The process this book explores is the move from one theory of education and love, riddled with fear, to a belief in embracing compassion and love. Another insight into the dysfunction of survivors is the constant need to relate all of life to their Holocaust experience.[52] Momik calls himself "a regular Holocaust homing pigeon".[53] Elsewhere, Grossman repeats the relentless impact of the Holocaust and memory on new generation Israelis. "Time and again, we discover that even if we reject the role, almost each one of us is a carrier pigeon for the Holocaust."[54] The author's lightness of phrase and colloquial dialogue softens the impact of this reality.

Re-explaining his raison d'être as a writer, his huge sense of loss (here Grossman and Momik's voices are indistinguishable) Momik says: "You know the horrible thing for me about the Holocaust is the way every trace of individuality was obliterated. A person's uniqueness, his thoughts, his past, his characteristics, loves, defects, and secrets – all meant nothing. You were debased to the lowest level of existence. You were nothing but flesh and blood. It drives me mad. That's why I wrote 'Bruno'".[55] This post-modern technique of discussing the process of writing *in medias res* ignites the relevance of this otherwise drifting story of a fish with a tale (sic).

There is a new element here in the novel: the perspective of women and female identity in Part Two as a sequence of parallels. In the magical-realist adventure there is a tension between the teasing and tantalising Sea, portrayed with the full armoury of feminine wiles, and her counterpart Earth, far more reasonable and steady. This is reflected in the realist fiction of Momik's life by the tension between Ayala, sexy mistress and source of inspiration, guide to the all-important White Room at *Yad Vashem*[56], and Ruth,

Momik's wife, who supports him throughout his unpredictable and flawed behaviour, who bears his child and begins to teach him how to nurture another with love. Grossman frequently presents his male characters as only partially fulfilled by one steady relationship, needing two women to provide complementary elements of inspiration. This is the fabric from which his later work, Be My Knife, is woven.

Another cameo episode within See under: Love finds development in the later novel: namely, the idea of banishment to Tel Aviv, as a means of conflict-resolution. Both Ruth and Ayala encourage him to seek a flat in Tel Aviv as an opportunity for meditation and writing. In metaphysical vein it offers Momik further opportunity to commune with the sea. (Conversely his hoped for liaison with Ayala never takes place). His mother, such a prominent influence on the young Momik, is here relegated beyond his sphere of contact. The adult Momik admits to finding no capacity to care for her, leaving only a residual "anxiety and remorse".[57] In all of these scenarios, the female personas are positive or negative facilitators but secondary characters nonetheless.

Shloma is seen as someone struggling, defeated by the medium (pure sea-of-consciousness inspiration) and the message. He is literally and figuratively washed up ashore, required to abandon this dialogue of magical realism, of transmigration of the souls, and explore another narrative which might provide a more accessible discourse of the Holocaust. The break from sea to land symbolises and enables the change of narrative, to Part Three.[58]

PART THREE

Entering the third mode of narrative, Grossman re-enforces his use of the fantastic in all its dislocations. For a concept as vital as the impact of the Holocaust on modern Israel, there is no "master-narrative". For each survivor, as for Wasserman, "the story was really his life, and he always had to write it again from the beginning."[59] Grossman uses no accepted code of memoir or document for Momik to trace his Grandpa Anshel's experiences during the Holocaust. He breaks the taboo of the time in Israel against imagining a scenario of the camps by one who was not directly there. The grotesque is used particularly in this section and assists in the endeavour of breaking through the taboo surrounding the subject. It is helpful to understand the effects of the grotesque, which as I have indicated, this novel subsumes into the rubric of fantasy:

> "The essential and bizarre mysteries of life are the grotesque's rightful domain and its frequent recurrence in modern literature give evidence of increasing recognition by authors of the hideous and monstrous qualities of the universe... As authors seek to combine discrepancies while still portraying their concrete reality as dissonant entities, I believe in a moral sense they are part of a redemptive act, attempting to restore what has fallen, and to retrieve a balanced picture of society'... a balance that 'is essentially unattainable..."[60]

Once again paradox and dislocation recur along with the greater sense of needing to understand and redeem.

In this section, both Grandpa Anshel and Momik need to re-inhabit the concentrationary universe, survivor and second generation survivor together, in a strongly symbiotic relationship. Grandpa Anshel/ Wasserman needs to take Momik with him to communicate his humming melody of a story that

Momik had only been able to glean incoherently in Part One. He needs to renew his covenant with his archetypal descendant: "I feel reborn", says the adult Momik as he steps through into this realm of grimness.

Yet Grossman challenges the concept of rebirth, used mostly to signify the process of entry into the Israeli life and culture for those survivors from Europe, at least according to the expectations of native Israelis. Rebirth in the sense of a phoenix-like re-emergence from the flames of the Holocaust is a more appropriate image. Momik, represents the second generation survivor in modern Israel, the artist, the intellectually and morally curious figure. Still, he needs a mentor, a guide, and at least Wasserman "knew the way out".[61] To avoid being engulfed by the world of the Holocaust, to sustain their identity, both author and narrator needed the safeguard of knowing they would find the way out.

This fantastical situation, for Momik to be able to co-exist in contemporary Jerusalem, and in the world of the Holocaust, represents the continued inter-action of the Holocaust with modern-day Israel. Grossman commands the reader as much as his protagonist to pursue this voyage of discovery. The title "See under: Love" is an instruction which spans the four sections, not only the encyclopaedic Part Four. Inga Clendinnen has shed further light on the "Gorgon Effect" of the Holocaust: "Even in death the head retained its power to petrify" and "the proximity of these people who suffered to our everyday world is the most challenging and terrifying."[62] Grossman uses Momik's proximity to the "persecutor-victim images" to draw the reader into his story, to subvert the discourse of narrative displacement, to make it accessible and to recuperate the distressing impact.

Grandpa Anshel, Anshel Wasserman, the adopted grandfather who arrives unexpectedly at Momik's home, was himself a writer. His stories about "Children of the Heart" fire the imagination of the young Momik, and lead him as the older protagonist to employ these characters to great literary effect in Parts Three and Four.[63] Wasserman's first covenant is to accompany Momik back to the camp with him; he enters into a second covenant in this section. Finding out that Herr Neigel used to read and adore his stories of the "Children of the Heart", Wasserman agrees to continue telling him their adventures every night. For his part, Neigel must agree to shoot him every night: Wasserman has seen his daughter shot and his wife taken to the gas chambers and seeks death anew every day, as if to find a vestige of humanity in the reliability or solace of death. But through some subterfuge of nature and time he is immune to all the efforts used by the Germans in the camps to destroy him. Whilst emphasising the fantastical elements of the story, Grossman's opening lines of this section – "When the third attempt to kill Anshel Wasserman came to naught" – prepares the reader for a grotesque parody of a system that resolutely succeeded in killing millions of its victims.

Wasserman's "pet-name" for Neigel is "Esau". This name signifies a family split asunder, rivalry and hatred between two brothers.[64] But it does not carry the same harsh impact as the concept of "Cain", perpetrator of fratricide.[65] Indeed, this image of Cain was a far more widespread one during this period. Dan Pagis' poem, "Written in Pencil in the Sealed Railway-Car", is a key example.[66]

By taking this expedition into the quasi-fictitious world of the camps (the camps were brutally real, but this representation is fictitious), Grossman

bridges the gap between what psychologist Charlotte Delbo has called "external intellectual memory" and "deep memory".[67] But to achieve this Grossman has to suspend the cruel probability of Wasserman's progress through the camps and allow him a voice.

Wasserman's return to the gentility of stories contradicts the Nazi practice of stifling inquiry, of burning all Jewish works, and it begins the unravelling of Neigel. Wasserman finds a way to touch a point of humanity in him; the layers of barbarism are peeled away to reveal a moral centre which proves too painful for Neigel to bear. This is part of a self-reflective comment on the power of literature that informs much of the book.

In her book, The Human Condition, Hanna Arendt refers to "unfixing the past". She claims that analysis and reappraisal can undo the set images and patterns in our minds that the past represented; equally preparation and anticipation can manipulate the uncertainty of the future.[68] For Grossman, literature holds the key to much of this understanding and anticipation. His work reinforces the claims made by Gershon Shaked about the value of literature in the reconfiguration of a nation's identity:

> "Literature plays a role in the life of the nation similar to that played by psychoanalysis in the life of an individual. The latter evokes traumatic memories from the depths of the past in order to cure disease and unify the scraps of a personality, and the former commits traumatic memories to writing in order to cure a national malady and to reconstitute the identity of a persecuted and beaten nation."[69]

A further intertext in Part Three is the medieval fourteenth century Syrian manuscript, "Arabian Nights", told by the princess Scheherazade to her

Arab captor to keep herself and her people alive. Michel Foucault has used this example in his discussion on the relationship between text and author

> "... the motivation, as well as the theme and pretext of Arabian narratives such as – *The Thousand and One Nights* – was ... the eluding of death: one spoke, telling stories into the early morning, in order to forestall death, to postpone the day of reckoning that would silence the narrator. Scheherazade's narrative is an effort, renewed each night, to keep death outside the circle of life. Our culture has metamorphosed this idea of narrative or writing, as something designed to ward of death."[70]

Foucault uses this theme as a preamble to his declaration of the "disappearance" or "death of the author".

However the layers of narrative used for Grossman's work have a very different function. The author (Grossman) is telling the tale of the narrator (Momik) who is accompanying the storyteller/author/Scheherezade (Wasserman) on a fantasy voyage to reprise his art of storytelling, with its moral and redemptive function. Therefore the initial connection between author and act of writing, to ward off death, is particularly relevant in this work. In this instance, however, it is designed to resurrect, or give a chance of recognition and immortality to those who did lose their lives or their core spirit in the Holocaust. There is a point of distinction: Scheherezade saves one life, not a multitude; and the princess's tale projects into the future saving of lives, whereas Grossman's projects backward to the imaginary "saving" of lives, lives that were in fact lost.

The theme of a Second Chance runs forwards and backwards in time throughout Parts Two, Three and Four. Originating from the concept of Bruno's Messiah text, (the text that Bruno Schulz had written but which had

disappeared) tantalising to both Momik and the Sea, the second chance is the corollary of Bruno's reappearance in the sea. And in Part Three the second chance manifests itself in Momik's joining Grandpa Anshel in the camps.[71] Wasserman finds his opportunity for continued existence through the humanising force of literature. But the Grandpa Anshel of Part One is inarticulate and inchoate when he is finally reunited with family in Israel in the 1950s; Grossman takes his readers along with his protagonists on a leap of fantasy to better understand the essence of his Holocaust experience. The covenant between commander and inmate gives Neigel a second chance too, and Grossman turns with innovative and iconoclastic approach to the characters of the Nazi captors. Thus Momik is given a second chance to trace a lost story, a synecdoche for many lost stories that must be told and retold. This is Momik's only way to gather together the shattered identity and connect the fragments of the worlds that had fallen apart.

Part Three is very dense in allusion and contrast; Momik chooses to "visit" Anshel Wasserman in his domain, just as he "visited" Bruno Shultz in his (in the sea and in his texts) in Part Two. Grossman juxtaposes the physical and spiritual worlds of the key characters. There is Momik, who is invited in as a chimerical witness; and Wasserman, who "returns" in a sophisticated version of "Show and Tell", to explore and explain the events of that time; and Neigel, who in a *volte face* of the original concentrationary world is the one bound to the time and place of the camps.

There is the puzzling question of Wasserman's "gown of gorgeous silk"[72]; this colourful magician's cape he is wearing is in stark contrast to the dour world he inhabits. Its purpose is multi-faceted: it immediately reveals that

Grossman has chosen the mode of fantasy for this section of the narrative. It signifies Wasserman as an enchanted storyteller. But most significantly, it bestows on Wasserman a covering palpably different from the shame of tattered nakedness borne by the actual prisoners in the camp. Although he is returned to the camps, he shall not suffer all of the same degradations.[73] The image of the enveloping cloak invokes U. Z. Greenberg's poem cycle, Streets of the River, where the angel/ magician Zaamiel transports the poet along under his cape into the very heartland of Destruction. Wasserman-Momik-Grossman and Zaamiel-Greenberg are in pursuit "of the special resources that must be granted to language if there is to be any possibility of effective response to catastrophe."[74]

The spiritual bond between Wasserman and Neigel is quite quickly formed, as Wasserman recounts: "Ai Shleimeleh, if I live and die a thousand times, if I tell this story to the unhearing world a thousand times, I will never forget the moment Neigel uttered the secret password of the Children of the Heart". This connection which takes the participants (Wasserman and Neigel) by surprise has caused considerable apprehension in the reception of this book in Israel, particularly regarding its contemporary implications of exchange between Israeli and Arab (because of the implied "humanising" or de-mythologising of the perceived enemy.) "But there is not a drop of blood in his body, and Neigel, too, is very pale. They both look hollow. As if everything inside them has been sucked out and spilled into the being of a new, transparent embryo made entirely of the supplications and fervour and anxiety of two who briefly glimpsed each other over the trenches."[75]

Grossman opens up the symbolism of this meeting of two souls into a universal image of two enemies at war who have the disconcerting and inexplicable experience of connectedness. As a broader socio-political commentary, Grossman has written a multi-narrative representation of the Holocaust after his study of the multiple voices existing within Israel and its territories following the Six Day War, in both his fictional Smile of the Lamb, and later his journalist essays, The Yellow Wind.[76] He has continually acknowledged his ethical commitment to dialogue rather than confrontation in even the most extreme situations. In this section it takes the form of Wasserman trying to find some part in Neigel which is more human, where an SS officer's rules of conduct diminish in influence. He seeks recognisable emotions, "for surely no one becomes a murderer without forfeiting happiness", and "I was beginning to think... I was wrong not to count him a human being."[77] This section was groundbreaking on Grossman's part as a new form of the narrative of conflict when he wrote it in 1986, and it still continues to be powerful 18 years later.

This work is ambitious in its elucidation of the issues arising out of its principle subject, the Holocaust as narrative. Stories evolve within stories, and characters float freely between contexts and timeframes. A large part of the book illuminates the process of writing and the art of creativity itself. This includes Momik's earliest forays into writing and his interaction with his wife, Ruth, and his mistress, Ayala, that connect him to the White Room in Part Two: Grossman shows the presence of both the joy and the pain of being a writer. In Part Three he brings this into clearer focus, from Wasserman's discussions with his original editor and mentor Zalmanson, to his interaction

with Neigel on the integrity of the writer. Wasserman remembers his dialogue with Zalmanson from the safer, calmer days, before the Holocaust. The same existential questions, or debates about artistic integrity, continue to be asked and to demand answers. Zalmanson exhorts him to write the "way an enlightened writer should"[78], to break the mould of stereotypical Jewish writing, "to write with love, and most of all with madness".[79] The fact of Wasserman's creative passion re-emerging in the camps is an intertextual response to Adorno's prohibition.

The characters from "The Children of the Heart" are brought back to life in Part Three; they reveal how inspiration provides the "nourishing placenta of memory".[80] Grossman calls on his readers to witness the process and effort involved in creativity. This may be perceived with humour and irony, but the message is clear. There is both a fear of the story, and an ontological need to tell it. Toward the end of Part Three Wasserman turns away from the sequence of the "story" of the camps and encourages a frightened Momik to "write about the baby". (The baby "Kazik" is mentioned in the story, and may be seen as a symbol of the story itself). In an episode layered in symbolism, Momik relates "I screamed and threw off the soft, warm hand where the story streamed in torrents. I flung myself against the smooth white walls, across the pages of my notebook, at the mirror, at my soul – there was no way out." And Wasserman gently responds "'Because you are like me, your life is the story, and for you there is only the story...'"[81]. This handover of responsibility for the story is very specific and can only be bestowed on a worthy successor (or apprentice, in the *Bildungsroman* formulation). Zalmanson had warned Wasserman about the most pernicious crime of all, of

plagiarism. And it is just this felony that Neigel is guilty of, and which completes his downfall. In narrow terms he has been pretending to his wife that he is the author of the story he tells her on his home visits, that the author Wasserman has long since been killed.

The broader context of his crime is that he has stolen the life-story of the Jews; he is responsible for destroying the genetic code of so many individuals whom Momik is determined to restore to life in the process of this book. He has appropriated a story of compassion and good deeds without adopting its moral. Wasserman becomes unable to use words with their traditional meaning, and begins to depend on substitutions: Momik witnesses Wasserman's pain after Neigel admits how he enjoys living. His agony is due to his complex system of attitudes toward everything the word "living" represents. He insists Neigel only be allowed to say "I enjoy onions" or "I enjoy herring" but not "I enjoy living".

This recognition of the power of words is paramount: "Could it be that Grandfather Anshel became a fugitive from human language in order to protect himself from all the words that cut his flesh?"[82] The spectre of the original identity of Grandpa Anshel returns to our minds, a man incoherent and impotent. Grossman's ethical conviction about the accurate use of words in their context, which has been the hallmark of his writing, is fleshed out.

In this confluence of ethics and creativity the narrator describes the Darwinist struggle of the creator (in this context, the story-teller) against the story. It is linked with the difficulty of telling a story where evil is the central motivation. There is a greater struggle: Momik dreams he is Neigel, and awakes feeling aware of a germ of evil within himself. This reflects inner

conflict in the face of moral choices, but on a wider platform must refer to the reversal of roles within Israel between the occupier and the occupied, in recent history.

Grossman paints this as a loss of innocence for Momik, conjured up in the only word Wasserman has actually written throughout his encounters with Neigel, "BEWARE". Lastly in this section we see the power of the tale overtaking the teller. "I too have a story writing me, and wherever it leads, I follow".[83] This is a narrative device, certainly, yet one which reinforces how significant the process of telling is.

The final pages of this section bring to life the challenge posed by Geoffrey Hartman, "to accomplish the impossible: allow the limits of representation to be healing limits yet not allow them to conceal an event we are obligated to recall and interpret, both to ourselves and those growing up unconscious of its shadow."[84] By presenting a central character who visits multiple strata of Jewish life, Grossman shows that this is true not only for the direct participants in the concentrationary universe, but for the "Seventh Million" who continue to suffer the aftershocks of the Holocaust earthquake.

PART FOUR

"The novel does not end optimistically", claims Yael Feldman "despite its insistence of the presence of good even at the heart of evil".[85] (She is referring to this particular novel). I feel the novel does not end optimistically because the ongoing process of healing is achieved through the means of confronting and telling the story, rather than the conclusion of such a tale. This is evidenced by Grossman reverting to a final narrative process.

Part Four is called "The Complete Encyclopaedia of Kazik's Life". The contradictions inherent in title are manifold. Grossman immediately subverts any expectations we may have of an objective and dispassionate explanation, of factual information and categorisation normally associated with the term "encyclopaedia". Hints of this divergent narrative are alluded to early on in the novel. For instance, in Part One we read that Momik's father refuses to allow him to buy regular books, and collects only the "Hebrew Encyclopaedia". However, Momik cannot locate answers to his most urgent questions, such as the meaning of "Happiness", there. Later the adult Momik begins to collect documentary material for a "children's encyclopaedia on the subject of the Holocaust... but the idea ended badly."[86] A declaration of purpose appears soon after this, "to examine words in a new way until they are understood."[87] An encyclopaedia is traditionally used as an educational tool. Part Four opens with a formal reader's preface, presenting the expectations of the work. However, these are immediately suspect: it will "dispense with literary tension... to avoid diverting interest from essentials", it shall "remove any burden of knowledge likely to create this tension". Then the tone changes completely "For instance, I've got to tell you this, I mean it nearly drove me insane!"[88] The conversations built into this encyclopaedic narration are an absolute narrative insurrection and entirely undermine the convention of an encyclopaedia as an educational tool.

In his novel, The Unbearable Lightness of Being, the Czech author, Milan Kundera, uses this device in his sections labelled "A Short Dictionary of Misunderstood Words", and "A Short Dictionary of Misunderstood Words (continued)". Kundera's novel explores the effects of political upheaval on the

lives of ordinary people. In both cases (Grossman and Kundera) the dictionary-type format, professing to clarify complex concepts, serves only to enhance the paradoxes.[89]

The turbulent, disjointed portrayal of Kazik's life, a whole lifetime in 24 hours, is a metonym for the lifespan of Israel, exposed to and interacting with a world whose pace is quite different from its own. All the elements of Jewish life are there: the Diaspora figures, the educated doctors and professionals, the concept of suffering, and how time plays out its grotesque pace, causing different struggles within each character. Time is like a separate protagonist, wreaking havoc in the story. As in the Theatre of the Absurd, events seem both pre-determined and totally haphazard. The dramatics of David Grossman's work is especially powerful in Parts Three and Four.

This section is far more complex in the English translation, because the alphabetical order follows only in the Hebrew. It is impossible to refer to or "see under" a word in the normal course. Particularly in this instance, where Grossman has selected the encyclopaedia entries with great purpose, the Hebrew version is far more powerful. It is significant to examine this encyclopaedic construction, the entries and the gaps: Grossman immediately overturns the hope vested in the title, since there is no information under "Love – *Ahava*" (the first entry), only the reference "*see under:* Sex". This instruction reappears and is reworked in the penultimate entry, "Documentation – *Tiud*". Ayala accuses Shlomik (Momik's name is transposed again) of failing in his endeavour for documentary clarification – "you know what it reminds me of? A mass grave". Perhaps this is the greatest indictment for Momik, a complete failure to resurrect all those that have been

lost, all the people who he has pursued throughout the novel. But she continues (like the Sultan in Arabian Nights) "and now..., if you want to save yourself... write me a new story... a beautiful story... I don't expect a happy ending from you. But promise me you'll at least write with Mercy[q.v.], with Love[q.v.]! Not *See under: Love*, Shlomik! Go love! Love!"[90]

Interwoven in this section are a multiplicity of carnivalesque scenarios, as each of the main characters are developed on different levels of the story unfolding within the encyclopaedia. The main site of this complex narrative is the Zoo where the natural order of things is continually overthrown. Simply the concept of living in a zoo throws up bizarre images of dislocation. Characters from Part One, "Momik", re-enter the story as the background to their harsh experiences, and their resulting "eccentricities" are recounted. The very format of the encyclopaedia is unstable. The final entry "Prayer – *Tefilla*" ends at a moment of time where Kazik is still three years old, despite his unhappy death being described earlier under "Kazik, the Death of – *Kazik, Moto Shel*".

In literary terms the way to portray a silent response is to leave blank spaces. Grossman uses this technique effectively under the entry "Life, The Meaning of – *Chayim, Mashmaut Ha*". He can find no true meaning of life in this narrative after all. Under "Education – *Chinuch*", Grossman describes the character Fried, surrogate parent, whose sterile approach to love had been redeemed first by Paula and then by the appearance of this unexpected baby Kazik. Fried reviews all that he wished to teach this child of love and compassion in the world, yet when faced with the shortcomings of the lives ahead of each of them, with the unpredictability of death and life, with the

impossibility of "a man to live in this world from birth to death and know nothing of war"[91], the two are left hugging one another in a silent embrace. Education cannot overcome this void. This is "the shriek of silence" of the Holocaust novel. Despite the redemptive love they now experience, and despite the rebirth of these characters from the mouldy pages of oblivion, each of the characters is faced with the silence of chaos and solitude. They are overwhelmed by their vulnerability and position of responsibility to carry on the word.

There is yet another intertext that informs this work and plays a powerful part in the impact of this book on its time: all those works of Holocaust testimonial and memoir, of document and fiction, which preceded Grossman's work. Despite and perhaps because of the biological fact that Grossman is not the child of survivors, this suggests that all young Israelis are burdened by the weight of this collective and at once very individual past experience. "Everyone in this country is a second generation survivor of the Holocaust, in one way or another. We all still live under this terrible anxiety".[92]

This book is Grossman's homage to his lost people, to give them a second chance at life, to recreate through his writing their inspiration and vitality. It works as a vehicle, for Grossman's credo, to recognise and understand difference in self and others, creating an ethical identity of self-examination. In this case he is considering the continuing impact of the Holocaust on contemporary Israeli society. He probes the psychological barriers of Holocaust writing, whilst utilizing innovative literary devices. The fact that See under: Love was so extensively read, has been so widely

translated, and is used in syllabi on Holocaust education internationally, reinforces how fundamental this breakthrough was.

ENDNOTES

[1] David Grossman, "My Sholem Aleichem" in Modern Hebrew Literature, 1995, Spring/Summer, 4-5

[2] Efraim Sicher presents a comprehensive analysis of Adorno's original statement in his 1949 essay, "*Kulturkritik und Gessellschaft*", and his further discussions in 1961, and in "Negative Dialectics" of 1974. Sicher illuminates the philosophical debate that the question of Auschwitz has spurred regarding aesthetics in the post-war era in his article, "The Holocaust in the Postmodernist Era" in Breaking Crystal: Writing and Memory after Auschwitz, edited by Efraim Sicher (Chicago, 1998).
Primo Levi's book If this is a Man (English translation 1959) and his following publications presenting and analysing the nature of degradation and dehumanisation the victims suffered and the full weight of evil of the Nazi perpetrators remain the foremost works on these issues.

[3] David Grossman, See Under: *Love*. Translated from the Hebrew by Betsy Rosenberg (London, 1991), 177. Original Hebrew publication *Ayen 'erekh: Ahavah* (Tel Aviv, 1986). Hereafter Grossman, See Under: Love.

[4] Appelfeld was born in Czernowitz, Bukovina, and moved to Israel in 1946. His work was originally seen as marginal to Israeli writing of the period. He began publishing stories in the 1960s and continues to be widely published and translated today. Badenheim 1939, The Age of Wonders, Tzili: the Story of a Life, To the Land of the Cattails, and The Immortal Bartfuss, are amongst the most well-known.

[5] Patterson, David (1948 -), The Shriek of Silence: A Phenomenology of the Holocaust Novel, (Lexington, 1992) 88. Hereafter Patterson, Shriek of Silence.

[6] Alan Mintz, *Hurban*: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature (Syracuse, 1996). His chapter "The Uneasy Burden", 239, opens with a full account of the impact of the Eichmann Trial [including the contribution Haim Gouri made in his newspaper reports on the trial several times a week.] The common attitude prior to the trial had been to try and suppress all reference to the catastrophe of the Holocaust, other than to those few people who could be seen as heroes. Understanding the horror for victims and survivors, understanding the full weight of the tragedy for six million **individuals** led to a change in approach: testimony and memoir began to be validated, survivors and bystanders were more encouraged to talk of their experiences to allow the process of healing to begin.
Hereafter Mintz, *Hurban*.

[7] Yehuda Amichai's novel, Not of This Time, Not of This Place (published in Hebrew, 1963) translated by Shlomo Katz (New York, 1968). This book takes the protagonist along a divided pathway, partly retracing his steps back to his birthplace in Germany and the sense of loss and dislocation he experiences, and partly conducting his life without this understanding, consumed by events in Israel.
Hanoch Bartov's The Brigade (published in Hebrew, 1965), translated by David S Segal (Philadelphia, 1968). It portrays the awareness of an Israeli writer who saw the Holocaust through his ancillary experiences in the Jewish Brigade, or as voyeur of those survivors who did make their way into Israel.

[8] Tom Segev, The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust, translated by Haim Watzman. (New York, 1993).

[9] Gilead Morahg, "Breaking silence: Israel's Fantastic Fiction of the Holocaust" in Alan Mintz (ed.), The Boom in Contemporary Israeli Fiction (Hanover NH, 1997). Hereafter Morahg, "Breaking Silence".

[10] Mintz, Hurban, 252. Treating the subject of the Holocaust with a degree of humour to try and access the outrageous events has been achieved to chilling effect by Art Spiegelman in his Maus "comic books".

[11] Yael S. Feldman discusses the debt Grossman's book owes to Kaniuk's novel in its portrayal of realism undermined by fantasy and in the supernatural skills of the protagonist who worked to save his own life in the camps but not his family. There is a carnivalesque quality evident in both novels. "Whose Story is it Anyway? Ideology and Psychology in the Representation of the Shoah in Israeli Literature", in Probing the Limits of Representation – Nazism and the "Final Solution", edited by Saul Friedlander (Cambridge Mass., Harvard University Press, 1992), 235. Hereafter Feldman, "Whose Story?"

[12] This is the thrust of Morahg's thesis: Morahg, "Breaking silence", 144.

[13] "My Sholem Aleichem", 5.

[14] Patterson, Shriek of Silence, 4-5.

[15] Kathryn Hume, Fantasy and Mimesis – Responses to Reality in Western Literature (London, 1984), 21, 164-5. (Italics are mine.) Hereafter Hume, Fantasy and Mimesis.

[16] Morahg, 'Breaking silence', 145.

[17] Rosemary Jackson, Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion (London, 1981) 20, quoted in Neil Cornwall, The Literary Fantastic from Gothic to Postmodernism (New York, 1990), 25.

[18] World Book Dictionary, Chicago, World Book, 1984

[19] I discuss the *Bildungsroman* genre in detail in Chapter Four

[20] David Grossman, "Books That Have Read Me" in Ruth Kartun-Blum (ed.) Writers and Poets of Sources of Inspiration (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 2002), 33-46.

[21] M. M Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination – Four Essays, edited by Michael Holquist, transalted by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, Univ. of Texas Press, 1998). I am referring especially here to the essay "Discourse in the Novel".

[22] Grossman, See under: *Love*, 48-9.

[23] Naomi Sokoloff, Imagining the Child in Modern Jewish Fiction (London, John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1992). In the Preface she explores the discourse of childhood in relation to Bakhtinian concepts.

[24] David Grossman, "50 years of Israeli literature". Conference held at UCL, June 1998.

[25] Meaning "hopeless case".

[26] Grossman, See under: Love, 26

[27] See David Ohana, "Zarathustra in Jerusalem: Nietsche and the 'New Hebrews'", in Robert Wistrich and David Ohana (eds.) The Shaping of Israeli Identity – Myth, Memory and Trauma (London, 1995).

[28] Henry Roth uses this technique in Call It Sleep, to represent the different uses of English, the accents and jargons, the foreign words slipped in that the young protagonist, David, hears around him. For Roth, an American-Jewish writer, this relates particularly to his parents' Yiddish and the Italian of the workmen in the neighbourhood and by the docks. This was a seminal work first published in America in 1934, but only attaining full recognition once republished in 1964.

[29] In Benny Barbash's novel, My First Sony, the narrator, the young Yotam, describes the difficulty that the survivors who come to his father to ghost-write their memoirs experience: "because these poor people, as Dad said once to Mom, want to translate their experiences into a language which hasn't yet been invented and will probably never be invented, and they rummage in the meagre and narrow lexicon of words available to us, trying to find the formula which will express what they've been through."[29] Narration of the Holocaust tale is removed from the survivor, yet the sense of loss and foreboding, the overwhelmingly suicidal tendencies that survivors experience, cling to the second generation survivor.

[30] Grossman, See Under: *Love*, 30.

[31] Ibid. 41.

[32] Ibid. 17. "*Alter kopf*" literally means "old head" in Yiddish and/or German, but figuratively it means "an old mind on young shoulders".

[33] Ibid. 33-7.

[34] "Epic and Novel" in M.M. Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination – Four Essays, ibid.

[35] An historical reference: the novel is located in the mid- to late-1950s, a time of much interest in the newly formed *Mossad*, part of whose job was to crack codes. Note the Beeri case of the day – a KGB mole was uncovered who worked very close to Ben-Gurion. No doubt this would excite a young mind, and especially a young boy.

[36] Grossman, See Under: *Love*, 43.

[37] Ibid. 35.

[38] Grossman does not develop any narrative about this experience, but Yoel Hoffman has presented the excruciating sense of dislocation the young Katchen, eponymous protagonist of his story, feels when removed from his home environment, however dysfunctional, and placed in a *kibbutz* school. He feels his entire identity, beginning with his name, is being heartlessly

[54] Grossman, "The Holocaust Carrier Pigeon – January 1995" in Death as a Way of Life – Israel Ten Years after Oslo, translated by Haim Watzman, edited by Efrat Lev (New York 2003), 18.

[55] Grossman, See Under: *Love*, 153.

[56] *Yad Vashem* is the major Holocaust Memorial and Museum in Jerusalem.

[57] Ibid, 156.

[58] The idea of being "washed up ashore" has many resonances. In the traditional Jewish idiom, one thinks of Jonah disgorged from the whale – and his attendant recommitment to pursue his prophetic mission, after his initial, famous scepticism.

[59] Ibid, 189.

[60] Michael J. Meyer (ed.), Literature and the Grotesque (Atlanta GA, 1995) from his introduction (unpaginated). Meyer is speaking generally, but it is pertinent to this book. Meyer's observation about inevitable unassailability relates to the Sisyphus motif.

[61] Ibid, 188.

[62] Inga Clendinnen, Reading the Holocaust (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999). "It's not that this material stands too far from us. It stands too near... we do recognise ourselves as very like urban Europeans of five or six decades ago... the persecutor-victim images that most transfix us, which make our hearts shrivel, are those that represent ourselves become not ourselves. It is this most direct threat to our confidence and our own personal integrity which lies at the heart of the Gorgon effect." 18. Hereafter Clendinnen, Reading the Holocaust.

[63] Tracing the "The Children The Heart" required some detective work on my part. Only after reading Musical Moment by Yehoshua Kenaz did it become clear that this referred in fact to a real series of children's stories. Thanks to Rachel Williams for resolving the puzzle.

[64] Esau is the brother of Jacob, from the first book of the Bible, Genesis. Although the first-born son and entitled to the inheritance from his father, Esau sold his birthright to his brother, later regretting it. This resulted in a long and bitter rivalry between the brothers. Genesis, Chapter XXVII.

[65] The story of original fratricide concerns the sons of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel. Jealous of his brother, Cain murdered him; in response to being questioned by G-d, he answered "Am I my brother's keeper?" this has raised the archetypal question about man's responsibility for his fellow human being. Genesis, Chapter 4.

[66] This poem has been widely published in anthologies. See also Dan Pagis, Points of Departure, translated by Stephen Mitchell (Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society of America, 1981), 23.

[67] Charlotte Delbo: "It may be possible to speak out of 'external, intellectual memory', where sensation has been tamed by conventional expression. But any attempt to call up 'deep memory' (which) preserves sensations, physical imprints, will renew trauma and throttle speech", in Clendinnen, Reading the Holocaust, 18.

[68] Hanna Arendt, The Human Condition (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1958).

[69] Gershon Shaked, "Afterword" to Gila Ramraus-Rauch and Joseph Michman-Melkman (eds.), Facing the Holocaust – Selected Israeli Fiction (Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, 1985).

[70] Michel Foucault: The Foucault Reader, edited by Paul Rabinow (New York, 1984), 103.

[71] Rivka Kashtan develops this theme further in her article on "constant redemption" in See Under: Love. Rivka Kashtan, "*Hageulah Hamitmedet Be-'Ayen Erech Ahava' Le-David Grossman*". *HaDoar*, 20-11-1987.

[72] Grossman, See Under: *Love*, 187.

[73] The theme of nakedness and its accompanying humiliation is discussed by witnesses such as Primo Levi as an immediate cause of disorientation and shame, and is frequently used in the accepted imagery of Holocaust fiction.

[74] Mintz, *Hurban*, 192-3. The link between the image in Greenberg's poem and in Grossman's novel is my own.

[75] Grossman, See Under: *Love*, 199-200.

[76] For further discussion on Grossman's political fiction see Chapter Two.

[77] Grossman, See Under: *Love*, 205.

[78] Ibid, 226.

[79] One insult Zalmanson heaps on Wasserman's head is that he writes like a "*Galizianer*, too long winded". The critic, Dan Laor, accuses Grossman of just this fault in his review of the book, entitled "*Galizianer*", appearing in *Ma'ariv* Weekend Books section, 07-03-1986.

[80] Grossman, See Under: *Love*, 223.

[81] Ibid, 297.

[82] Ibid, 283.

[83] Ibid, 300.

[84] Geoffrey H. Hartman, "The Book of Destruction", in Saul Friedlander (ed.), Probing the Limits of Representation, 332-334.

[85] Feldman, "Whose Story?", 236.

[86] Grossman, See Under: *Love*, 278.

[87] Ibid, 290.

[88] Ibid, 304.

[89] Milan Kundera, The Unbearable Lightness of Being, translated by Michael Henry Heim (London 1995). First published in Czech in 1984.

[90] Grossman, See Under: *Love*, 450.

[91] Ibid, 452.

[92] David Grossman in conversation with Tal Bashan, in the article "*David Grossman, Sippur Radyo*", by Tal Bashan, *Ma'ariv* Weekend, 31-01-1986. The translation is my own. Tal Bashan reinforces the claims of the American publishers, Bantam, that this work is the most original Hebrew novel since Shira by S.Y. Agnon, an equal to The Tin Drum by Günter Grass, and One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel Maria Marquez.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Kid in the Cupboard:

The adolescent struggle for identity in Grossman's

Bildungsromane

The Book of Intimate Grammar

and

Someone to Run With

PART ONE

"Don't be confused by surfaces; in the depths everything becomes law. 'And those who live the mystery falsely and badly (and there are very many) lose it only for themselves and nevertheless pass it on like a sealed letter, without knowing it'"[1]

With his choice of this epigraph from Rilke to The Book of Intimate Grammar Grossman signals to the reader his plan to contrast internal and external realities and the struggle the protagonist will have in his search for identity.[2] The title from Rilke's book Letters to a Young Poet further reinforces Grossman's focus on adolescence. Grossman has a passionate interest in the young adolescent, at the point of ontological quest and self-discovery. He writes about the turbulent years where the young inquiring mind is trying to come to terms with his inherited identity in the uncomfortable

adult world of structures and strictures. The opening scene of The Book of Intimate Grammar points to the development of a young boy encountering his adolescence, which is a typical feature of the *Bildungsroman* genre[3]. It is a time for new insights about himself and the world around him. However, for the protagonist, Aron Kleinfeld, the processes of growing up are terrifying and traumatising. The normality around him is excruciating; experience and observation cause excessive anxiety. The plot of this novel does not advance the protagonist's education into life's way, the underlying principle of the *Bildungsroman*; instead, it leads him to withdraw into the depths of his inner world. Internal psychological development accounts for movement in the novel more than external events do, and resulting in Aron's evermore tentative relationship with the outside world. Aron's youthful enthusiasm quickly transmutes into shame and guilt; this in turn causes him to invent his own inner arena of time and space where he hopes to find safety and purity.

Amongst Grossman's range of novels one can find several of what may be called Aron's "cousins" – protagonists at the threshold of youth. For example: David in his early children's book Duel, Momik in his work exploring the impact of the Holocaust on the next generation of Israelis in See Under: Love, and Nono in a book originally aimed at young adults, The Zig-Zag Kid. Grossman's latest novel, Someone to Run With, presents a parallel pair of young adolescent protagonists, Assaf and Tamar, each engaged in a mission that will transform their sense of self.[4] This last book introduces many innovations, not least the young female character with a relevance equivalent to the male in the pursuit of identity and resolution within the adult world.

Grossman's focus on the child's narrative voice is compelling. The child sees things for the first time, with fresh eyes: there are no weary clichés in a child's perception of the world. He needs to demystify anew the information and sensations he experiences, as he tries to understand just how it all fits into his own developing identity. Franco Moretti, in his analytical work on the *Bildungsroman* in European culture, reinforces this theme with a quote from Charles Dickens: "'...I believe the power of observation in numbers of very young children to be quite wonderful for its closeness and accuracy.'"[5] Moretti highlights a common viewpoint amongst authors engaged in the *Bildungsroman* which idealises childhood insight or even clairvoyance. (Clairvoyance is presented in the character of the four-year-old Noa in the second Grossman novel under discussion, Someone to Run With.) Naomi Sokoloff has written about the narrative voice channelled through the child's eyes in Imagining the Child in Modern Jewish Fiction. She elucidates the way the discourse of childhood is "necessarily constructed by an adult narrator" to give "oscillating perspectives".[6] The "dynamic interaction between mature and immature voices" results in the "exploration of clashing cultural codes", she continues.[7]

Moretti, too, pinpoints the way the image of youth reflects the level of stability in the host society:

> "The more a society is and perceives itself as a system still unstable and precariously legitimised, the fuller and stronger the image of youth. Youth acts as a sort of *symbolic concentrate* of the uncertainties and tensions of an entire cultural system, and the hero's growth becomes the narrative convention or *fictio* that permits the exploration of conflicting values."[8]

The intense concentration of Israel's historical and political development over the twentieth century forms a constant background to its fiction. In The Book of Intimate Grammar and Someone to Run With, Grossman reflects changes in the sense of confidence and optimism in the shaping of the identity of his protagonists within their surrounding society. Instability and the residue of dislocation in the parental society are far more acute in the earlier novel, and account for the protagonist's heightened struggle within and against it.

This chapter will focus on

A. The *Bildungsroman* and its evolution as a 20th (and 21st) century genre.

B. The key elements of the genre as they relate to these two novels – The Book of Intimate Grammar and Someone to Run With present diametrically opposed directions in the process of *Bildung* (formative growth and development).

C. Registers of language, expressing sociological aspects of Israeli life, from the disparate languages in use, alongside Hebrew, in the growth of Israel's complex, multi-cultural society, up to the everyday, ever-changing street argot of contemporary Israelis.

D. Closure as representative of the deep meaning of the novels and their social and ethical message: the open-ended sense of despair and isolation of one novel is compared with the triumph of intuition and instinct in the other.

A. The *Bildungsroman* and its Evolution

The Encyclopaedia Britannica defines the *Bildungsroman* as

> "A class of novel that deals with the formative years of an individual up to his arrival at a man's estate and a responsible place in society... The *Bildungsroman* ends on a positive note though it may be tempered by resignation and nostalgia. If the grandiose dreams of the hero's youth are over, so are many foolish mistakes and painful disappointments, and a life of usefulness lies ahead."[9]

Goethe's late 18th century novel, Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship, is considered as the archetypal *Bildungsroman*, from which most writers on the genre derive their definitions.[10] Francois Jost believes that lines of kinship can be drawn between literary genres over several centuries "if one believes in the evolution of the various species rather than in their extinction." He claims that species (or genres) continue to evolve in an irreversible motion, according to the dynamics of specific societies. Although the *Bildungsroman* is a genre both "unstable and protean, it continues to show qualities which seem to guarantee vigorous survival."[11]

Moretti sees it from a different perspective: He claims that "when a form deals with problems it is unable to solve... it is a literary failure" – as in the later forms of the *Bildungsroman*. But the factors which determine "failure" for Moretti are similar to those Jost uses to account for the genre's evolution: the trauma of a new age and the dynamic changes in society. Thus a real conflict of ideas about the survivability of the genre is avoided.[12] In Grossman's two major novels of adolescence the "protean"[13] nature of the *Bildungsroman* is manifest. Examining the component themes of the

Bildungsroman reveals that Grossman has written one anti-*Bildungsroman* and one contemporary traditional *Bildungsroman*.[14]

In her instructive work on the subject of the present-day *Bildungsroman*, Susan Gohlman presents a "workable definition" of this genre of formation (of the protagonist). "At the heart of it lies the notion of the individual in contact with a world whose meaning must be shaped and reshaped from within up to the point when the hero is in a position to say 'I think I can live with it now.'"[15] Aron does "shape and reshape" the world from within in a process of desperate interiorisation. But the intuitions he feels and the resolutions he attains work to deny him any comfort level within the world he finds around him.

Assaf and Tamar in Someone to Run With operate within a different dynamic: they adapt and adjust to the challenges of society encountered on the bustling streets and harsh underworld of Jerusalem. They each attain personal fulfilment on several levels, working individually and later together (against the criminal world, and in the budding relationship between them). The principle that guides Tamar through her adventures is to be tough and true to her goals. For Assaf the guiding principle is his determination to trust himself ultimately, to allow his growing faith in his own worth to emerge. These represent two manifestations of *Praxis* that are completely alien to Aron.

The *Bildungsroman* reveals the process of forging an adult identity, in the transition from childhood towards maturity through confronting the doubts, questions and self-evaluations of adolescence. Close reading of the component themes typical of the *Bildungsroman* with examples from the two texts will illuminate Grossman's artistry in approaching this process, and the

development of the genre in his work. It is a cogent demonstration of *Bildungsroman* and anti-*Bildungsroman*. I divide this chapter into an analysis of these elements as they appear first in one book and then as they appear in the other.

B. Key Themes of the *Bildungsroman*[16]

1. Darkness into Light

The typical *Bildungsroman* traces the passage from darkness into light, as the young protagonist moves from clouded knowledge and foggy intuitions, towards a clear understanding of his place in the world and his role vis-à-vis his own life and those around him. Aron's route through "the space between"[17] graphically follows the opposite direction. The book opens with Aron viewing his immediate world from an apartment balcony. He perceives the characters in his life-story with perspective and objectivity. His two closest friends are at his side, and, more significantly, they follow his game-plan and instructions. His parents can be seen on the pavement down below, taking an evening stroll. Although he experiences tremors of excitement and guilt at this spying adventure, he seems in control. Fully aware of his parents' every thought, he lip-reads his mother's words in conversation with others. He hears her voice in his head, her opinions are predictable.

This structural device of introducing many of the characters from a bird's-eye view represents a particularly forceful opening to the novel. Moreover, the image of the child as clairvoyant stands in direct contrast to the novel's ending, where Aron folds himself into the darkest and smallest of spaces, across "the darkened valley" from home. His own body becomes "the

unfamiliar zone of hell."[18] All effort is poured into accomplishing his greatest "Houdini performance".

But the book ends with no clear resolution of this last struggle; Aron remains alone in an abandoned dank refrigerator. He vaguely reflects on those around him and their fate in the pending war, "who would win and who would lose."[19] But he tries to free himself from any external focus, even from his "sombre name hovering over the valley"[20], as his parents begin to call out for him in the final scene. Rather than developing a *modus vivendi* to challenge the world, Aron has been pursuing every possibility of interiorisation which will help him avoid its realities. In strong contrast to other *Bildungsroman* heroes, escape becomes his *modus vivendi*, his defining identity.

2. Apprenticeship

The concept of apprenticeship is pivotal to the *Bildungsroman*. Whether undergoing a practical training or a psychological preparation for life (learning through the interaction with others) the protagonist must experience rites-of-passage which enrich and empower him. The Book of Intimate Grammar is rich with rites-of-passage, each of which seems to diminish, rather than enhance, Aron's powers and capabilities vis-à-vis the outside world. The most significant of these is his *bar mitzvah*.

As a defining moment for every young Jew at age thirteen, the *bar mitzvah* period is filled with far-reaching cultural significance.[21] Traditionally the growing boy regards his *bar mitzvah* as a form of apprenticeship towards maturity and enhanced responsibility within the Jewish world. Apprehension and expectation precede it; usually a great deal of mixed feelings accompany

the *bar mitzvah* day, not least pride and fulfilment. It is certainly a moment of self-examination.

In The Zigzag Kid, Nono's adventurous train journey, a quest for identity, forms the essence of the book. "Who am I?" (*Mi Ani?*) is his private password. It begins as a *bar mitzvah* gift organised by his father and surrogate mother Gabby. The results of Nono's adventures, alternately racing and tentative, are revelations about his late mother, his true grandfather Felix and a better understanding about himself. Nono's father's voice, the guiding chiding detective, is never far from his consciousness. In *Bildungsroman* terms, this voyage of discovery is a true apprenticeship.[22]

In The Book of Intimate Grammar the chapter dealing with the plans for Aron's *bar mitzvah* describes the claustrophobic atmosphere within the family surrounding the still resilient protagonist. Everything focuses on the material issues: who to use as a photographer, the venue and menu for the grand dinner. The point where Mama determines one blisteringly hot summer's day that Aron should try on his boots, signals the start of his personal unravelling.[23] He is wrenched away from an intimate and satisfying moment with Papa, up in the tree they are tending, and plunged into a nightmare of guilty discovery. Initially Aron can still turn to his father for consolation:

"'That's Mama for you, she likes to have things ready in advance,' he whispered. 'Suppose we have to buy you a new pair of boots this year?'"[24] This passage reveals his parents' concern that he has not been growing much lately, an issue that assumes gigantic proportions for Aron from this moment onwards. Mama's obsessive and suffocating concern is quietly dismissed by

Papa. "'Don't take it to heart, Aronchik, your Mama loves you. She worries, that's why she talks like that... She wants you to be the best in everything, that's all. A mother is a mother.'"[25]

But the very next scene displays a sharp contrast to any sense of a growing, trusting relationship developing between parent and child. Sent to search for thick socks, in Mama's need to ensure that last year's boots will be too small, Aron happens upon his father's rather sordid collection of pornographic cards. Far from a loving, nurturing introduction into sexuality, he receives a brutal and nauseating one. These episodes, following swiftly upon each other, denote his reversal of fortune. "He curled up into a ball and realised that things had not been going at all well lately. There were certain signs... he only knew that up until now it might have been possible to turn back the wheel of signs and proofs."[26]

His head begins to swim with the multitude of sensations; he tries to make sense of them all, but is left feeling confused and suffocated: his parents' cloying relationship, Mama's most unwelcome and oppressive hugs, his older sister Yochi's unhappy struggle with her own physical manifestations of adolescence. The tangible image of the family sitting down to a meal of thickly sliced bread and herring is interrupted by Aron's memory of toilets blocked by mysterious objects relating to Yochi's "curse" (her menarche). There are further prohibitions and warnings from which he does not necessarily draw the appropriate conclusions ("Aron too learned to be careful in the toilet").[27]

Suddenly all else fades from his mind as he is overwhelmed: "an arctic fog descended, full of ghoulish apparitions, naked bodies..." The feeling of

being protected that is associated with childhood seems to vanish. Aron had never felt so vulnerable, so besieged "how fragile life is, he never realised that before... He felt his soul evaporated into a single quivering strand."[28] The author's device of using stream of consciousness increases Aron's sense of confusion and bewilderment as he tries to decipher myriad inexplicable moments. Dinners play a significant motif in the *Bildungsroman*, representing either a supreme moment of civilised behaviour, or its opposite, when this "neutralised space par excellence has reverted to the state of a battlefield".[29] This focus is even more pronounced in the framework of the importance placed on food in Jewish culture.

Chapter Thirteen, the *bar mitzvah* itself, opens with a benign sentence: "One pleasant winter morning, the Sabbath of his *bar mitzvah*, Aron was called up to read from the Torah."[30] For every *bar mitzvah* boy his own portion is significant, even sacred. Aron's Torah reading is identified by the *Haphtarah* (portion of the Prophets) from Isaiah VI. It is essentially the section dealing with the Ten Commandments, the bedrock of Judaic belief, given by G-d to Moses and the Children of Israel in the desert. No doubt this represents powerful material for a young child to carry in his heart as his own. Aron recalls more particularly the accompanying portion from the Prophets.

> "Then flew unto me one of the seraphim, with a glowing stone in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar; and he touched my mouth with it, and said:
>
> Lo, this hath touched thy lips;
>
> And thine iniquity is taken away,
>
> And thy sin expiated"[31]

The relevance lies in the Seraph's ability to purify the words of prophet and people. Aron hangs onto this verse; its significance is integral to the story since it leads Aron towards the belief in the need to sanitise words for his own internal grammar. It transpires that he will chant it to himself everyday from this time onwards, as he secretly dons his *tefillin* (phylacteries) under the bedcovers. "Because maybe he had sinned. Maybe he needed to atone."[32] He hopes that by some act of atonement his "damn biology" would relent, his pituitary gland would be activated, and after these miserable years of penance he could finally commence to grow.

There is an intertextual parallel here between Aron and David Shearl, the young protagonist in Call it Sleep by Henry Roth. David studies the same passage from Isaiah in Hebrew classes. It too strikes an immediate chord.[33] In Roth's novel it is linked with a far more religious orientation of sin and atonement, G-d and redemption, darkness and light. "What did Isaiah say that made his mouth dirty? Real Dirty... You couldn't do it with ordinary coal. You'd burn all up... but where could you get angel-coal? ... Only G-d had angel-coal. Where is G-d's cellar I wonder? How light it must be there."[34]

A comparison of The Book of Intimate Grammar with Call it Sleep is instructive. David Shearl is also a young adolescent, struggling to find his own identity in a world of confusing messages. And language is a pivotal index to decode these different meanings. The final scenes of the book present an epiphany of languages and dialects from a multi-lingual Lower East Side New York, as David tries to electrocute himself. By this act (he falls unconscious and is at first presumed dead), he divests himself of all the "foreign" languages around him: his mother-tongue Yiddish, the biblical languages of Hebrew and

Aramaic used for study, as well as the street jargon that assault his senses. The subconscious thoughts flooding his mind whilst being rescued and as he drifts off to sleep are in the purest English. The psychological and social developments are presented as a linguistic synecdoche. Aron too is spurred on to self-realisation through language. He needs to divest himself of the psychological and physical demands of family and society by developing an internal language, a source of refuge.

On his *bar mitzvah* Aron begins to read his Torah segment with joy in his heart. But he is almost immediately aware of his father's awkwardness; the moment of pleasure in his fragile and insecure world is diminished further by the rabbi's stern gaze. Rather than his approbation, Aron experiences his painful condemnation for having once raised the question of Divine justice... Little is known of Aron's relationship with the rabbi, a possible mentor: "Narrowly suspicious, he watched the radiant son dance before his father with outstretched arms... and Aron, in the height of his rejoicing, felt the sting of the rabbi's eyes upon him." Far from a sense of growth and fulfilment drawn from the ritual of apprenticeship, Aron absorbs the ferocity of disapproval, "stabbing himself over and over with the dagger-like memory of his rabbi's side glance." Later he wants to withdraw from the tumult of guests arriving at his home to celebrate with him.

His feelings of unease are only exacerbated by the bizarre vision of the food arriving like a protected child, brought by "two Orthodox Jews" who had "wheeled an old baby carriage all the way from Mea Shearim with a huge pot of noodle *kugel* swathed in towels to keep it warm."[35] Given the repeated importance of food in the Kleinfeld family life, this is significant. Whilst

alluding to Aron's "ineptitude" in growing any taller, or being able to enter the mature adult world, the food is coddled as if treatment like a baby is the only approach that his family understand. In reality, they are treating the inanimate food more gently and humanely than they are treating him.

Far from the grand and sophisticated plans the Kleinfeld parents once nurtured for the special day, the party degenerates into a hot and sweaty crush of embarrassing moments: constant bragging by various sets of relations about their own offspring, constant hinting at Aron's unsatisfactory height, gaggles of rude jokes and bellyfuls of rich food. "The air was full of tiny darts, phrases waiting to burst with poison, compliments with false bottoms, the caress of secrets shared and carefully circumvented topics."[36] If this novel were to be represented as a conventional *Bildungsroman,* the adventures that Aron recalls on this day should each enhance his self-esteem and his sense of progress on the path to maturity.

Instead, his encounter with Giora, his cousin of similar age from Tel Aviv, serves to reinforce all Aron's physical shortcomings: Giora is tall and good-looking, he has a girlfriend and significantly needs to leave early to attend a "scouting event". Aron's own unhappy rejection from the Scouts will be discussed in the section on "brotherhood of the elect", below. Giora's very presence stimulates Aron's painful memories of the torments he suffered when visiting his cousin the previous year. He admits his obsession with one crucial moment when the two of them had struggled on the sinking raft:

> "He'd thought about it thousands of times... it was not impossible that his difficulty had started at that moment when scarcely any oxygen reached his brain; yes, how often he had pictured that scene to himself, the murderous expression on Giora's face in the grey-green water, how

> he ruthlessly climbed over Aron to save himself, turning Aron into an enemy, and maybe that was a turning point for Giora too... as though they'd both been through a kind of secret ordeal, which only Giora had passed."[37]

Those who should be guiding and mentoring the young man in preparation for adulthood - his rabbi, his parents his surrounding family – all leave him feeling betrayed.

3. Overcoming Wilful Errors

The conventional *Bildungsroman* protagonist must understand and overcome any wilful error he has committed. This falls within the process of adapting irrepressible juvenile impulses towards a more mature, controlled personality. Aron suffers from a fairly constant self-questioning anxiety, searching for any errors he may unwittingly have made, in his giant struggle with his pituitary gland. His family seem to accuse him of deliberately choosing not to grow "as if he had betrayed them, or brought some plague into the house that isn't mentioned in the Bible... and ruined everything."[38]

Aron secretly prays every day. He plaintively searches his soul for some clue to his guilt. "But what could he have done. He was pure, the purest member of his family... Maybe he had sinned in his imagination."[39] Purity for Aron is linked to sexual innocence and a triumph over physical needs. It echoes the theme of lingual purity from his *bar mitzvah* portion. His parents yearn for vicarious kudos from his achievements. This undoubtedly inflates his crisis of guilt whenever he cannot match their expectations. Aron's efforts to "fight his damn biology single-handed" cause him acute physical suffering. His attempts to achieve purity by sublimating all toilet requirements until out

of the house have led him from an initially exciting adventure, sneaking into his neighbour Edna's apartment to use her pristine facilities, to the untenable situation once Papa is invited there to tear down the walls: "A month's worth of food spinning round and round in his stomach, like the revolving drum of a washing machine". Eventually, after all his most strenuous efforts to keep internalising – "his thoughts, his words, his food" – he is subjected to the relief of "primal disgrace" and Mama's reaction of "pagan horror".[40]

As Aron fails to achieve his physical maturing, he continues to search for some explanation for his being locked in a present that is not at all the "present continuous" of his soaring imagination. This is the newly learnt "present continuous" tense of English, not encountered in the Hebrew language: "'*I em jum-ping*'"; "'I em jum-peeng...' Jumping far out to space, halfway to infinity, and soon he was utterly absorbed and utterly alone; jum-peeng; it was like being in a glass bubble... there was so much happening, every second lasted an hour, and the secrets of time were revealed to him."[41] In direct contrast to a present tense of unlimited possibilities, Aron senses his mother "wanted to lock him inside the future and jangle the keys in his face."[42] His mother wants to circumvent the processes of growing up, arriving simply at the hearty and successful end point. Aron wants to flee these processes. As an escape route, Aron cultivates his imaginary world, a second more reliable brain buried under his heart, where all words are first sanitised. If he is guilty of any wilful error, it is this inability to control his imagination, which Moretti regards as pivotal.[43] The imagination is "the source of two errors that can throw us off the path towards 'maturity'. Restlessness, the 'rambling thoughts' of Robinson Crusoe that make man too much of a

wanderer... But even more than restlessness, intensity, which compels him to see an excess of meaning in what surrounds him, and to bind himself too thoroughly and too quickly. Prematurely, in ways that are not those of an 'adult'."[44]

4. Understanding of Life Gained from a Conscious Self-Culture.

As the young *Bildungsroman* protagonist realises he needs to make his own decisions for the course his life will take, and determine his own value system, his engagement with the world becomes intensely focused on finding meaning. Aron's frantic, restless and intense reactions to his environment prevent him from extracting or absorbing any inherent meaning from his ordeals in his confrontation with the adult world about him, or a sense of understanding the compromise and cooperation required to cultivate progress and enhance his situation. He races along a manic path of recharging words, and re-establishing rules of identity for himself. The narrator portrays him with compassion and gentle ironic humour, most evident in his interior monologues, as he negotiates and wagers with himself:

> "... If only he could get rid of that monotonous buzzing, that never-ending lament in his head, no answer, no answer, the gland was indifferent to him, it wouldn't answer, and it was so hard to keep the rhythm as he walked through the crowd; maybe there's a course in public walking like they have in public speaking, obviously you've never taken it, you stop, they move, they stop, you bump into them, and for almost an hour now they're the ones who've been deciding where you go."[45]

As he moves along, quite alone in the crowded square during Independence Day celebrations, he conducts his inventory of "new toys" that all the young

people seem to have, except himself: "Adams apples and sideburns and moustaches and breasts." He tries for one brief moment to question his judgements:

> "But wait, maybe he was the one who didn't understand, he, Aron, who wouldn't allow himself a single moment of illusion of self-forgetting; maybe they go together, those things and the pleasure they bring. If only he could win the struggle with himself, get around himself, forget himself for five minutes, maybe that's all he needed, five minutes. Okay... you know what would happen then? You'd be just like they are. Huh?"[46]

This is his ultimate horror, a point of compromise he refuses to understand or allow.

Grossman pinpoints the conflict of identity in adolescence: the need for the young individual to feel unique, versus the need for him to belong to a group. Aron feels he cannot be like the young virile people in the square, or even less like his parents. In this model of the anti-*Bildungsroman*, "youth begins to despise maturity and to define itself in revulsion to it."[47] His entire purpose is to transfer any meaning he may glean from the real world around him into his own vocabulary of experience. Contrary to increasing his accommodation with the adult world, his self-cultivation leads him further and further from the pulsating, vigorous physical world around him, and inwards to his encoded "secret hospital he'd established in the bush." Words are the patients he has to rescue, transmute by rigorous means of self-inflicted pain and mental exercise: "'youth'... all bubbly, happy, swingy, springy, free, htuoy, htuoy.." (To purify a word Aron must say it backwards.) "It sounds Japanese. In urgent need of treatment, Aron operates." He traps the word in his head, traps the blood of his one hand tightly at the wrist leading to an

overwhelming feeling of nausea, and here in the square feels trapped in the "stifling ring of flesh", floundering but unable to budge, "not even Houdini could help him here."[48]

5. Initiation into Brotherhood of the Elect

"Initiation into the brotherhood of the elect"[49] is a conspicuous feature of the *Bildungsroman*, argues Buckley. In every generation and period of history this has a different specific connotation. To develop this idea further, R.B.W. Lewis suggests that "every age of fiction develops its own representative hero: its own human image of the values it acknowledges and the force or power it respects and responds to."[50] The question of heroes and role-models pertinent to the historical background play an important part in the development of the *Bildungsroman*. The novel The Book of Intimate Grammar is set in 1960s Israel, in the period leading up to the Six-Day War of 1967. There is a pervading feeling of worry, fear of impending attack, in the society around Aron. The predominant youth culture of the time consisted of scout groups and youth movements, which were also involved in a certain sense of martial preparedness.

Cousin Giora's strong commitment to scouts necessitates his leaving the *bar mitzvah* party early. The relationship between Aron's friends Gideon and Yaeli develops over heated discussions about participation in their youth group and is consolidated during the week they spend with their group working on a kibbutz. The socialist concept of brotherhood is dominant. Both Yaeli and Gideon (already a youth leader) have strong affiliations with the group. Aron is

completely marginalised by the group whose activities he has rejected and who have humiliatingly thrown him out.

> "...at first when everyone was joining a youth movement, he tried going to a couple of meetings, but then he quit. He couldn't stand those assemblies and standing in rows, and the ceremonies and the anthems, and doing everything together like a bunch of robots, so he kept making wisecracks and joking around till finally they kicked him out. And now it was too late to join again. They were all filled up, and anyway, by now everyone knew he was – was what? What was happening to him?" [51]

Self-doubt rather than self-confidence overwhelms Aron, regretful of the experience others seem to be gaining. "Hey, they're arguing like grown-ups, he thought unhappily, they were getting all that practice in their youth movements while he spent his time daydreaming or playing with Pelé and Gummy, or hunting spies."[52]

Aron is disheartened by the socialisation of his classmates, especially those he originally believed to be "untainted". Michael, for example, now enters the seeming conspiracy, this transformation into gyrating, sexually aware teenagers: "and look, wow, Michael Carney, what's he doing here, he's not a '*socie*', not in any youth movement either, *pareveh*[53], but he's dancing too, look, he's dancing with chutzpah... at least he dared, watch and learn, his gland has secreted that special substance that enables you to forget yourself and deceive yourself."[54] But he cannot reverse the direction he is taking, which leads him further and further from community activity. Even his conversation is isolating: "Where should he start? In his loneliness of late, words had come to be utterly inward, whispering a grammar so intimate and tortuous they could never break forth into the light."[55]

From the opening scenes of Aron as ringleader in their boyish games, summoning his real and imaginary friends to do his bidding, Aron has withdrawn completely. His friendships lose their validity as he dismisses the "outward Yaeli, and the outward Gideon too", even the "outward Aron"[56], and recreates his private internal society, responsible only to his internal rules and structures. When Gideon attempts to share with Aron the crucial secret of the defence force call-up code "Red Sheet", Aron is bewildered and lost: "Aron shook his head no, he didn't understand, what was Gideon talking about? What did all his words amount to?" Trapped now in his interior world, the realities of the pending war are devoid of meaning to him at any level – whether that meant the real impact on his peers and family, or even less the national concern, "let them have their war". [57]

no italics

6. The Hero as Artist

This gifted young boy, eager to be a famous guitarist, a great football hero, a playwright or film-producer, seems to find all his talent sapped. *As with all Grossman's young adolescent protagonists, Aron has a heightened sense of self that is laden with artistic potential. In this book the protagonist's journey reinforces the sense of loss and failure in his proudest endeavours. "Aron felt as though a big hand had just snuffed out the candle in his darkened cell."*[58] *He feels that "the wunderkind ... (has) lost his wunder."*[59] *Finally, all enterprise, all artistic enterprise is channelled into completing wondrous Houdini-type escapes, efforts that are fraught with desperate uncertainty.*

The similarities that appear between Aron Kleinfeld and Stephen Daedelus in The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man relate to this heightened

artistic sensitivity, and questioning sensibility. James Joyce's novel of 1918 presents a crucial point of comparison to The Book of Intimate Grammar.[60] Joyce's protagonist essentially undergoes the suffering and agonies of the artist, pains of love, questioning of religious, existential and aesthetic values. But he experiences a central epiphany, and emerges stronger, more resolute. Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man is widely regarded as a twentieth century *Bildungsroman*[61]. The two protagonists, Aron and Stephen Daedelus, share the need to divest themselves of the constraints of the seeming nightmare of personal background and history, to find any comfortable framework for their future lives. However, their achievements are very different, a further illustration of the contrast between norm and anti-norm.

7. Sensitivity to the Suffering of Others

The typical *Bildungsroman* hero becomes acutely aware of the plight of the less fortunate; he grows more sensitive to social hypocrisy and corruption. But The Book of Intimate Grammar does not focus on social critique. In contrast to the typical development from lonely child to wise humane critic Aron lives in an isolated egocentric world. Rather than showing concern for the arbitrary fortunes of society, Aron is overwhelmed by the arbitrariness of his own body. This disparity is made more powerful by comparison with the protagonists from Grossman's other novel under review in this chapter.[62]

8. Role-Model of the Father

Many *Bildungsroman* protagonists experience a dominating father figure that, they then replace with a substitute role model.[63] Typically the

father is absent, either by death or mistrust, as he seeks to thwart the hero's strongest drives and fondest desires.[64] This defection of the father forms the principle motivating force in the youth's assertion of his independence. From the earliest scenes we are aware that Aron's situation is very different. His father is kind and given to tending and healing – he volunteers to treat the sick tree, gathering under his generously nurturing aura Aron's friends, whose parents are absent or neglectful.

Mama is presented as far more dogmatic and insensitive, taking decisions in the family with a firm but questionable sense of moral correctness. She is seen as the archetypal Jewish mother, overbearing and over-anxious, instilling guilt rather than respect in her family relationships, part of the cultural Jewish code which forms the background to the book. Aron is fraught with the conflict of disloyalty in disagreeing with her, but his sister tries to free him of this guilt: "'Listen to me, li'l brother,' she said, coming closer, 'hear the word of the prophetess Yocheved[65]: A day will come when you will hate your mother, you will hate her with an intense black hatred and do anything you can to get out of her clutches...'" When Aron protests, Yochi responds coolly and calmly, ominously. "'Watch out... Beware the day when it's a matter of honour not to hate her.'"[66] And indeed, his mother's sweaty physicality and her insistent nagging continue to oppress and overwhelm him, to confuse all sense of loyalty.

As the book unfolds, Aron's feeling towards his father lurch along in unhappy ambivalence, too. From his vantage point up the tree, Aron is first confronted with the idea of a relationship between Edna, a neighbour in their apartment building, and Papa, as she flirts airily with him. Then when she asks

Papa to knock down the walls of her apartment, Aron is faced with a far more troublesome image. Papa's huge, strong and increasingly corpulent body is shown in all its physical performance. Like a soldier on duty he fulfils all his labours. There's a mythic Herculean quality to this man. But when this strength hints at a powerful sexuality, Aron is overwrought. From the mysteriously disturbing pack of pornographic playing cards, to the vision of Papa rhythmically pounding at Edna's apartment walls, Aron faces the unequivocal truth with growing turbulence. Frantically he looks to Mama for protection; he turns inwards for solace and escape. Aron finds he returns day after day to watch the destruction of Edna's apartment, dissolving the borders between her wispy spirituality, all virginal refinement and soulfulness, and Papa's tangible power and corpulent sensuality.

The book reviewer, Shelley Kleiman, sees this richly symbolic and allegorical section as the most problematic, because she sees Aron as being hinged on the sidelines, his internal narrative interrupted.[67] But this is Grossman's opportunity to set up the historical background of Aron's parents, Moshe and Hinde Kleinfeld, as well as exposing Aron's total inability to confront the realities of the relationships around him.

These chapters in the centre of the novel magnify all the elements of Aron's conflict with the adult world, exposing what the attainment of adulthood, and the successful resolution of his rites of passage, would mean. As the game of flirtation and power is played out between Edna and Mama on one level, we learn how, through animal instinct, Papa survived the ordeals of The Taiga in Siberia, where "his youth would wither in the bud".[68] We also learn that Mama is older than Papa; that once he reached Israel, she restored his

vigour by feeding him, "the man emerged from the skeleton... she forged his manly charms, like a miner striking gold".[69] Using food to cure all problems is exactly how Mama will attempt to overcome Aron's immaturity. It is significant that Papa's masculinity is a function of Mama's nurturing; he can never be disloyal to her. In this respect they become one unit for Aron: there is no father figure to rebel against, there is a combined, pulsating, burgeoning parental entity, with an arcane physical and emotional life of its own.

Edna is the alter-ego of Aron, representing a yearning for fulfilment and exotic romance. Her apartment is a metonymy for purity and sensitive form, a haven for Aron's little tormented soul. Edna breaks down her inner confines, only to lose her structure and hold on life. So Aron's ambitions to attain this adulthood are undermined, and disintegrate. He reacts to the visions he cannot bear by blotting them out, falling into a "stupor". Edna muses about his "kind of hypnotherapy"; "the sight of Aron troubles her, sleeping feverishly."[70] His compulsive sleep can be seen in psychological terms as the avoidance of a certain reality. All the while "guarding" the deconstruction work, he yearns for escape. "Come on, its time to go, I have homework to do."[71] Aron's frantic thoughts are woven into the third person recounting of Papa's history. As Edna's persona is obliterated by the Mama-and-Papa team, she becomes dry sapless, "turned to stone."[72] Edna later disappears completely, becoming for Aron "another person I've betrayed."[73] Her vanishing confirms the absence of role models for Aron.

9. The City as Liberation or Corruption[74]

The city is portrayed as an agent provocateur for liberation or source of corruption in an archetypal *Bildungsroman* novel. He typically needs to venture from the security of home, experiencing loneliness in a strange place or temptations of tantalising newness; he will need to resolve the conflicting attractions and disruptions. Jerusalem is the locus for The Book of Intimate Grammar. But the Jerusalem of this novel is un-symbolic, flatly non-metaphorical, with no irresistible impressions of either vitality or *ennui*. Gershon Shaked points out that Jerusalem is the "most lyrical of cities... What symbol has not been used to symbolise the symbolic, to allegorise the allegorical?"[75]

If we contrast *Yerushalayim shel Ma'alah* (the spiritual Jerusalem), a regenerative force, with *Yerushalayim shel Ma'atah* (the physical Jerusalem), the prosaic suburban block of flats in the Beit Hakerem neighbourhood of the Kleinfelds, we experience the full weight of the anti-*Bildungsroman* quality of The Book of Intimate Grammar. As the accelerating forces of history (the expectation of war) are absent from Aron's immediate consciousness, so the captivating qualities of Jerusalem are absent from the foreground of the Kleinfeld family drama. The only modification of locus witnessed is the interior changes in Edna's apartment, representing internal and psychological disintegration.

However Grossman explores place and space in a different way in his novels, especially within the network of his young adolescent "family" of related protagonists. As a significant pointer to the method the author adopts to cope with challenge, and to develop the idea of perspective, his protagonists

have to wrestle with confined spaces, cloistered locations, in the process of finding self-realisation and purpose. Those of his works aimed at a younger readership are poignant and humorous: David, in the story Duel, finds himself in Chapter One "Under the Bed" and in Chapter Two "Still Under the Bed", as he tries to gain knowledge and understanding of the adult world and its unfamiliar struggles. Since Duel is a children's book, Grossman encourages his character out from under the bed, and later into the wide-open road to the valley. But the world of Heinrich Rosenthal, the old man in Duel, is contained in a suitcase, in the beloved portrait of an eye, and of a forehead. The suitcase can be seen as the synecdoche of confinement, for the world of the emigrant, and his memories.

In The Zigzag Kid, the action originates in a railway carriage, where the protagonist, Nono, is confounded by plots and stratagems around him. His existential search, his confrontation with his genetic inheritance, takes him to various unexpected interiors, for example, the locomotive, limousine and "Volkswagen Beetle".

Grossman travels down into the dingy basement with Momik, his protagonist in See Under: Love, who tries to propagate grisly, mystical concoctions to counteract the nefarious "Nazi Beast" (an imagined entity conjured up in the child's mind after hearing his parents speak in whispered tones about the Holocaust). In addition, Momik's parents spend all day cramped in their tiny ticket booth.

Aron originally views the world from Edna's balcony, where everything outside seems so safe and small. He continues to choose confined areas, hiding in the linen cupboard to converse with his sister Yochi. After the

disintegration of his secure, safe environment, once Edna's walls are hammered down, Aron resorts to one final desperate stunt in the old refrigerator, with all the connotations of a do-or-die gamble. Jerusalem the city reinforces his anxieties and cannot offer any uplifting or enervating energy to Aron, who is absorbed in the more immediate concern of escaping from himself, the "outer Aron".

10. The Question of Love

In describing the typical *Bildungsroman*, the literary critic, W. H. Bruford says the hero "of course falls in love with more than one kind of girl, some appealing to his senses and some to his mind. The novel usually ends when he has gained some sense of maturity."[76] Feeling emotionally abandoned by Papa and Mama, hating the sexually implicit activities, the "smutty surprises" his more forward school friends seem to be experiencing, Aron does fall in love. "Through the Alchemy of despair, the only philosophy he really knew, Aron's first love blossomed overnight."[77] However he submits to the idea of love, rather than to love itself, as he looks for a repository for his infatuations, considering all the girls he knows for 'something worthy of his eternal love."[78] He homes in on Yaeli Kedmi and savours each vision of her modest beauty, her blushing movements.

At this point of transition, he happily regains some closeness with Gideon: norm meets anti-norm, only to further highlight their differences as they diverge later. He shares with Gideon his love for Yaeli, the exciting collection of hidden images and talismans he's been accumulating in "the new place, her place, somewhere to the south... a round new world floating inside

him, an adorable bubble, with a tiny dancer tapping her toes inside it."[79] It becomes apparent that there are indeed two kinds of Yaeli: Aron's guarded inner Yaeli, perfected and refined, who he has transformed into a vision he would love "unto death in the rosy future to which they would jointly aspire."[80] And then there is the flesh and blood girl, the "outer Yaeli", who Aron and Gideon often accompany home and meet with whenever possible. Aron's relationship with this former and idealised Yaeli seems to hover just where it began, static, immature, and voyeuristic. He is unable to bridge the sea of revulsion he feels regarding physical, adolescent relationships, unable even to translate his fantasies into real, vivid conversation. He uses his art of infiltrating evidences and mementoes inward to sublimate any "impure" thoughts (he literally swallows paper with her name on it in his sandwiches, in an almost cabbalistic ritual).

In a further transmutation of adolescent urges, Aron and Gideon plan to celebrate Yaeli's birthday by baking a "huge sweet *challah* in her likeness."[81] An important theme emerges in this delightfully childish action – the contrast between the fantasy of love and a real response to love. Although empowered by his love, this is the furthest stage Aron will allow his physicality to emerge, in the fond recreating of his darling Yaeli. Whereas Gideon allows this deed to actualise or embody his affection for Yaeli, as a platform for a developing multi-faceted relationship, one from which Aron is more and more excluded. Papa immerses himself in the joyous toil of baking, which had been his original occupation, until he suffered an accident. Aron reminiscences on those happier times, before "Mama turned Papa into a clerk", and how he used to sneak longingly into Papa's place in the bed when he went

out on his early shift, cuddling up to Mama in a metaphor of biblical transformations: "Aron as a fervent Jacob, stealing Esau's blessing from his blind father, Isaac."[82]

By this exercise Papa returns to his former masculinity, contentedly occupied, as he was when tending the tree. The simple pleasure of all three is augmented by the fact that "Mama is indignantly excluded from the kitchen." By this plan to bake the *challah*, Aron further fulfils his family ethos of food as a representation of, and substitute for, physical love. But his parents' taunting and humiliating accusations persist, whether about his growing, how he should manage his romance, or how to outsmart Gideon in the tug-of-war over Yaeli.

Subsumed by his over-nurturing, over-protecting Mama, Aron cannot begin to experience the development of a relationship with any other woman. Aron's existential need here to leave the claustrophobic family atmosphere and journey forth joins his other litany of urges propelling him inward, the only direction he knows, away from *Bildung*, or the initiation of a place for himself in society.

11. Unpredictable Vitality of Life

"The unpredictable vitality of Life" is significant part of experience for the *Bildungsroman* hero on his journey. The strength that comes from "flashes of sudden insight... a perdurable grandeur in the natural world or an elemental dignity in the human gesture"[83] enhances and intensifies the attainment of maturity. Moretti calls this maturation the "well-cut prism in which the countless nuances of the social context blend together in a harmonious

'personality': I exist and I exist happily... I have acquired 'form', I exist 'for myself', because I have willingly agreed to be determined from without."[84]

But Aron experiences the unpredictable vitality of Death. He claims to believe in savouring the slow sweet death of suicide. He witnesses the process of a death that yet refuses to be final, as his Grandma Lily goes through all the motions of dying. The end seems to draw near with the whole family united in their commitment and devotion to her. All else diminishes in importance at the centre of the battlefield. "Striving against suffering and death, shoulder to shoulder with Papa and Mama and Yochi, marching to a single drum... Aron was proud to take part in this ancient rite of leading Grandma Lily out of the family and into the outstretched arms of Death."[85] However neither Life nor Death conform to expectations, and Grandma Lily, causing a confusion of wonderment and guilt, is eventually revived by a simple operation and returns home: "the family accounts with Fate were a mess; the letters had been switched."[86]

Fate seems to play games with them, as Aron plays games with Death. "Death, Death, he whispered to himself to see if anything would happen... what if you were, say, a secret agent sent by Death to prepare humanity for its sorrows."[87] While seeking vitality and challenge, Aron cannot find it in Life. Life's natural processes seem to have betrayed him. His physical growth and development appear blighted. Around him others too fall victim to the sheer fallibility of the Life and Death order. Grandma seems unable to die. "Maybe death had forgotten her, maybe she was already dead, maybe this was death."[88]

Grossman had developed this theme in far more complex and symbolic detail in Part Three of See under: Love, where Wasserman, the old Jew, is

repeatedly killed, but does not die. In The Book of Intimate Grammar, the context is Aron's obsession with the untrustworthiness of his world. In an amusing vignette here, Mrs Kaminer is seen preparing for her husband's inevitable death in the first chapter, begrudging all the costs of keeping him alive. Later her "accounts with Fate", too, are confounded when Mr Kaminer survives her and continues to cope as well, if not better, on his own.

Aron's games with death become ever more grotesque. Determined to rid his body of his final milk tooth, he tricks Gideon into agreeing to pull it out by primitive procedure. This represents the ritual of separation from Gideon, the clash of *Bildungsroman*-hero and anti-*Bildungsroman*-hero, who can no longer coexist in the in the fictional world of the book. In the midst of Gideon's clear panic at the bloody outcome, Aron swoons, experiences dreamlike visions, before the throbbing pain sets in: "*Death is right*, and all the rest is error."[89] He finds some comfort in behaving like "an old man on his deathbed, giving his blessings."[90] He despairs of finding any vindication for his abhorrent body: "It would emerge from the tunnel with Aron as himself, not the exuberant, solid piece of life he used to be, and inwardly he still hoped to fuse again, to unite unto death, in a oneness of flesh."[91] Aron seeks a metamorphosis of himself, from this child of thwarted growth into the inner Aron, of unlimited possibilities. This wish for transformation, however, results in his final Houdini game in the abandoned refrigerator.

The argument for The Book of Intimate Grammar as anti-*Bildungsroman* is considerable, particularly in the development of Aron's character. Nevertheless there are key characteristics of the *Bildungsroman*

present in the unfolding of the main secondary character Gideon's adolescence: Gideon does move from darkness to light, from being a follower, anxious and unaware, towards beng someone who has tremendous clarity and purpose. His initiation into a brotherhood, i.e. the Zionist youth movement, his acceptance of its demands and practices does show a strong commitment and social responsibility. Gideon suffers an uneasy relationship with his father. "Aron had once heard him telling Gideon: 'I'll always love you as a son, but you have to earn my friendship.' It made Aron cringe to hear Gideon's father say those words."[92] Gideon is vastly uncomfortable in his father's presence, and is in the process of forging his own identity of an affirmative, self-made personality.

During the love sequences, Gideon initially needs Aron to open up the possibilities of a relationship with Yaeli. He grows and matures significantly through his developing love relationship with Yaeli, becoming considerate of others' feelings, able to make commitments, and learning how to contest, argue, relate. He develops a fitness for life. Gideon and Aron share a moment of final epiphany with the rite of pulling out Aron's tooth, of trying to rid himself of his childhood. Inasmuch as Aron emerges shattered and bereft from this, Gideon too struggles with all that Aron represents for him, his childhood loyalties and secret codes. His final savage encounter with Aron in their ritual of separation leaves Gideon sadder, stronger and wiser.

Why does David Grossman present Gideon in such sympathetic contrast to Aron? Gideon represents another perspective of Israeli reality: the strong, sure survivor, overcoming adversity and contradiction. In *Bildungsroman* terms, as François Jost emphasises, he fulfils "the pursuit of selfness, rather than the display of selfishness."[93] In this book, at the point in

time when the story is set, Gideon represents the archetypal hero of previous years, quite at a distance from the present-day realities of 1991. The social and political upheaval in the background "bequeaths... a set of problems and attitudes – a sort of 'primal scene' that the novel will never be able to forget."[94] Aron is the embodiment of a far more anxious and individualised character, insecure and apprehensive. The author recognises the psychological and cultural validity of both modes of hero – hero and anti-hero – although he clearly shines the spotlight on the latter in this novel.

C. Language and its Shaping of Identity

The alchemy of despair that Aron suffers brings to mind the "*alchimie du verbe*" of Rimbaud, who turned to the instinct of language for his redemption:

> "I wrote of silences and of nights, I expressed the inexpressible. I defined vertigos... I accustomed myself to pure hallucination...Then I explained my magic sophisms by means of the hallucination of words! I ended up by regarding my mental disorder as sacred. I was idle, the prey of a heavy fever. I envied the happiness of beasts – caterpillars who represent the innocence of limbo, and moles, the sleep of virginity!"[95]

Rimbaud was "the archetypal 'artist as a young man' of the late nineteenth century", according to Moretti, who also sees an equivalence between Rimbaud and the twentieth century hero of the "counter-*Bildungsroman*" (I prefer the term anti-*Bildungsroman*). Moretti refers to the "bold attempt to confront traumas and their linguistic turbulence". Aron is struggling to confront the traumas of his quotidian life. Like Rimbaud, Aron is consumed by his hallucinations, his magic circle of solipsist art. But unlike Rimbaud, he cannot "master and use them as means for self-revelation and growth."[96]

Instead, the reader must retrieve him amongst "the chaos, the fantasy, the frenetic innocence."[97]

Neither Mama nor Papa can provide Aron with any redemption through language. Papa's Hebrew, which he learnt from Mama, is fairly primitive; his inadequacy is played out in the scene of the "salt whatzit" (*haZeh shel haMelach*), showing Aron's far more sophisticated command of the language. The author writes with great insight about the struggles of immigrant parents with the Hebrew language. Aron's facility in Hebrew in particular represents one sphere of superiority to his parents. Hence his responses – guilty or proud – to that situation are significant in illustrating his personality, or self-definition. With Papa's increasing resentment follows Aron's strong determination (and fantasy) not to betray himself. "Don't worry, they may defile my body, but the essence of me will be pure forever. Long live the salt cellar, long live the somersaultcellar (נשאר ממלחה, נשאר ממלכה), and Aron, with a chicken wing sticking out of his mouth, flies blissful as a light beam, in the radiant splendour of his word."[98]

As awareness of his parents' sexual relationship becomes evermore unavoidable, climaxing in the clear signs of Mama's new albeit unplanned pregnancy, Aron needs to create a private isolated world with developing urgency. Moretti underlines the opposition between experience and trauma: "In a trauma, the external world proves too strong for the subject... And as the whole process of socialisation becomes more violent, regression inevitably acquires its symbolic prominence."[99] Aron's preoccupation with foetuses in formaldehyde, pain experiments, his own tears, indicate to the reader, as he

folds himself into the refrigerator, malodorous but womb-like, that he is not seeking acceptance by this society, but rebirth into a different world-order.

Mikhail Bakhtin describes the genre of the novel as the new creative and cultural consciousness, evolving and changing just as each period's present-day reality changes. The natural language of the novel, he continues, is a polyglot one, representing the process of active, mutual cause-and-effect and inter-illumination.[100] The concept of heteroglossia can be seen to evolve, too, from the mutual influence of one language and its culture on another. In The Book of Intimate Grammar, Grossman uses language as the source of intergenerational discord: the language used by Aron's father and mother, the different registers of the older hybrid Hebrew, speckled with Yiddish sayings and inaccuracies, juxtaposed against Aron's exact and meticulous language, displays the clash of generations, and their mutual mistrust. This miscommunication is further explained by Moretti: "Heteroglossia and dialogism... are *inversely proportional.*" Reinforcing his contention that "heteroglossia, as such, embodies a principle hostile to dialogue," he claims that "it shouldn't be surprising that in the masterpieces of heteroglossia the dominant linguistic exchange... is *misunderstanding*, which is the opposite of communication and the collapse of all dialogue."[101]

Significantly the shift from Aron's speech in conversation with the outside world, to his internal language in dialogue with himself, shows his progression from the outer, integral, everyday world to his inner, frantic one. There is a move from the third-person narrator – in control, coherent – to the first person narrator – Aron as chaotic persona, whose world order is disintegrating. "Aron to Aron, hurry, hurry, over... you have to take it all.

Leave nothing behind. A wholesale exodus. Over and out."[102] Having told his story, he is still searching and speculating in the unknown, represented by space-flight language, reaching out from his nightmare. The responsibility for filtering and organising the plot then devolves upon the reader.

Another Modern Hebrew example of an anti-*Bildungsroman* where *heteroglossia* shapes identity can be seen in Yoel Hoffman's novella "Katschen". It is set in Israel in the period following World War Two and the Holocaust, when new immigrants burdened by their traumatic war-time experiences were arriving in Israel. Katschen is a young Viennese immigrant whose mother has died and whose father is too ill to care for him. Initially he is looked after by an aunt and uncle, loving but inappropriate as guardians, both equally foreign in Israel. They originally refuse to send him to school because to them the education seems suspect. Ultimately a decision is taken to send Katschen to a *kibbutz*, where he would be properly assimilated into the culture of the new, vigorous youth of Israel. He would learn Hebrew and be re-energized after the ordeals of the Diaspora experience and the Holocaust.

All the elements of the anti-*Bildungsroman* are contained in this novella. For Katschen there is also no happy integration into the brotherhood of the New Hebrew and no sense of validation from the *kibbutz* school. He mourns the loss of his name – his very identity is being stripped (the *kibbutz* director decides to call him *Chatul*, meaning "cat" in Hebrew, since all names were to be Hebraized); he mourns the absence of his parents, he yearns for his family's polyglot language. Katschen runs away; at the neighbouring farm he manages some mostly non-verbal communication with the Arab farmer who sees his plight and takes him in.

Unable to reach any understanding of life's way, Katschen is dispossessed. He cannot live in the city, with his peers at school, or with his relatives. The young child finally goes to visit his sick father who has allegedly lost all sense of reality. The final scene is based on their mutual need to recognise and attach to each other's unstable identities. Together they hope to journey towards some sense of self, a meagre hope considering their dislocation from all factors that would validate them.[103] "Katschen" is highly innovative in its use of language. German and Yiddish phrases are used in the main body of the text and translated into Hebrew in its margins. Hoffman is drawing attention to the multilingual character of immigrants into Israel, and the social stigma attached to their Diaspora identities.

Both Katschen and Aron are defined by their inner and outer worlds of language and try to use language as a means of escape and solace. They create a private artificially manufactured world of safety, filled with neologisms and transformed words. Their inability to communicate with society around them leads to their ever-increasing isolation. "Katschen" is addressing the sociological conditions of the time, whereas The Book of Intimate Grammar is addressing the psychological process of adolescence. Yet despite their differences, for both protagonists the need for escape from the intolerable reality of the present is paramount.

Aron strives to find his identity through the instrument of language, to decipher the code of his inner world. For this he needs to search himself and reach right out to the reader. Rather than finding authentication and validity in an integrated personality, shaped by social realities, Aron's subjective fantasies ensure his avoidance of them. He is given validation by the understanding and

concern of an entirely different society than that described in his book, the society of readers in the contemporary world.[104] Grossman described this phenomenon in an interview, in which he revealed that hundreds of readers had sent him letters with self-addressed envelopes, asking just that he reveal whether Aron survives his final, fateful ordeal.[105]

D. The Conclusion of the Novel

In the complete reversal of the pedagogic novel, Grossman seeks not to educate the protagonist to deal with his problems, but to share the pain of his suffering with the reader. Rather than being able to overcome life's obstacles, the protagonist is overwhelmed by them. This is in agreement with David Miles' definition of the anti-*Bildungsroman*: The goal is not the growth of self, but its anxious, almost compulsive preservation.[106]

The reader needs to salvage Aron, to ensure his escape, the survival of the insecure and apprehensive hero. The self-consciously outreaching nature of this work is further emphasised by Rainer Maria Rilke's preliminary dedication, and by this further extract from his Letters to a Young Poet:

> "Go inside yourself... dig down deep... To let each impression and each embryo of a feeling come to completion, entirely in itself, in the dark, in the unsayable, the unconscious, beyond the reach of one's own understanding, and with deep humility and patience to wait for the hour when a new clarity is born."[107]

Surely this novel is Grossman's attempt to open that "sealed letter", and his challenge to the reader to retrieve and interpret it.

There is an instructive comment by Buckley, which sheds light on all novels of youth, and is relevant when assessing the conclusion of The Book of Intimate Grammar. He presents the

> "common difficulty of ending a *Bildungsroman* with conviction and decision. The typical novel of youth is strongly autobiographical and therefore subject at any time to intrusions from areas of the author's experience beyond the dramatic limits of fiction. Since his career is still in progress, he can hardly be sure that the initiation of a hero in many ways so like himself has been an unqualified success. He may, therefore, choose to leave the hero's future ambiguous... But whatever course he follows, he will not find it easy to give his novel a cogent and organic ending."[108]

This relates to the problem raised by the Formalists regarding the crossover between art and life, in this case between the novel and autobiography. They maintained that art is a self-contained continuous process, and allowed no point-to-point correspondence between imaginative literature and personality.[109] I do not mean to argue the areas in which David Grossman's fiction is autobiographical; however the author's comments on his own youth give an insight into the self-conscious quality of this novel. He discusses his obsession with reading Sholem Aleichem, which his father gave to him, as a young boy[110]:

> "From day to day, from page to page... something new grew inside me, an apprehensive understanding that all those things, seemingly strange and foreign to me, were me, were my father who was me. That the code before me could be deciphered if I matched it with something inside me, which was hidden even from me, but which I suddenly felt." [111]

This mythic mastery is exactly the process which Aron recreates by "digging his tunnel" into himself. As Grossman described of his own childhood, "In every spare minute I would plunge into my Jewish *shtetl*, which was becoming very tangible and close to me. I lived intensely in both realities, a double agent from 'here' to 'there'."[112] What emerges is the author's capacity to make his protagonist seem representative as well as idiosyncratic. As Buckley argues,

"Sublimity transcends the egotism, as the 'I' may speak for all humanity, and a painstaking account of the author's own mind will necessarily reveal much that is characteristic of the whole mind of man."[113] Hence Grossman, by overturning the traditional development of knowledge through experience, is portraying an alternative standpoint: pain and acute emotion, self-consciousness and fear, are not necessarily borne away by the manly pursuits adolescents aspire to. These very real inadequacies remain, and can be all-consuming, overwhelming the process of maturation and beyond.[114]

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PART TWO

Grossman has written in diverse genres, sometimes returning to an earlier one and introducing a new approach, re-exploring the sense of identity it promulgates. In February 2000 he published Someone to Run With which reappraises the criteria of the *Bildungsroman* in a fresh and innovative way.[115] A different *zeitgeist* is explored as a result of the following circumstances: Thirty years separate the settings of the two novels, and much has changed in the society regarding youth culture and the sense of the individual during the interim. From a political and historical perspective, the years 1999 - 2000 (when the second book was written and published) were still full of hope that the Oslo Peace Accords would materialise into a lasting accord between Israel and its Palestinian neighbours. (These hopes were comprehensively dashed

later in the year 2000, with the failure of the Camp David II peace talks and the outbreak of the Second *Intifada*.) There is a development from the younger, angst-ridden heroes (Aron, the young Momik) to more self-contained protagonists of about sixteen years old. The scenario of the book is positioned at that stage just before the army intrudes on virtually every young person's life in Israel, and is free of reference to a national struggle for existence against external enemies. Instead, Grossman brings into play the issues confronting adolescents in modern society everywhere.

This new novel is about the adventures of two young people, Tamar and Assaf, in their search for self-realisation and their dramatic encounters with the society around them. Assaf is given the task of locating the owner of an abandoned dog, Dinka. He races after the dog on a helter-skelter journey through the streets of Jerusalem, as together, boy and dog encounter various people who will ultimately help him find the owner, Tamar. During the process Assaf's eyes are opened to a new affirmation of his own identity. Tamar has embarked on a mission to find and salvage her brother Shai, last known to be a musician on the streets of Jerusalem, and someone embedded in a demeaning world of drugs and criminal dealings. Her experiences will test her every resolve and self-definition. The novel is recounted in parallel interwoven sections, as the developing events and thoughts of Assaf's life are juxtaposed against those of Tamar's.[116] It charts the two protagonists on journeys that lead them outward bound and eventually towards one another as they attempt to complete their individual quests. A further manifestation of Grossman's continual experimentation with a genre is his treatment of the *Bildungsroman* with reference to two independent central heroes.

This section focuses on the following issues:

A. The thematic evolution from The Book of Intimate Grammar to Someone to Run With

B Factors that contrast the shaping of adolescent identity between the hero and the heroine of the *Bildungsroman.*

C The major presence of Dinka the dog in this novel.

A. Evolution from The Book of Intimate Grammar to Someone to Run With

This evolution is best illustrated by considering the points determined by Buckley above. By using the same criteria for assessing the hero as used for Aron in the earlier novel, it becomes evident that Assaf's journey does take him along a route towards self-discovery and inner growth whilst interacting with his family, his society and his city. The obstacles and difficulties on this course of true *Bildung* reinforce his sense of self and trust in his inner worth. He does need, as Rilke advises, to dig deep, and not be confused by surfaces. He learns to appreciate the contributions of the new group of mentors he encounters, which are often belied by their eccentric exteriors. In direct contrast to Aron, he emerges as a well-rounded hero of the modern *Bildungsroman.*

1. ***Darkness into Light***

Assaf is literally wrenched from his tedious summer job in the gloomy office of the City Sanitation Department into the mystifying and invigorating world of Jerusalem. The "kid in the cupboard" of the earlier work is undoubtedly out on the streets. Assaf's dormant identity is about to be stimulated into new avenues of self-discovery. His unconvincing responses are dictated by the voices of others in his head. These will be re-evaluated and amended according to the events of the next few days as Assaf begins to take moral responsibility for his own actions, a most illuminating experience for him.

Tamar's encounters with darkness are more enduring. The cave she is preparing for the final element of her escape and her foray into the underworld of illicit drugs and criminal activities keep her in a state of spiritual tension for longer. Her resilience and tenacity are tested to their limits as she must constantly evaluate her inner worth. Lightness comes to her as the nascent trust in herself and others is validated. As the literary critic Esther Kleinbord Labovitz argues, the goal for the *Bildungsroman* heroine is "self-knowledge through higher consciousness". The energy she seeks, continues Labovitz, lies within: "Like the epic hero who goes into the dark forest" the heroine, "who cannot fit into society as she found it, enters the dangerous darkness to seek illumination. Her spiritual quest rests on the journey and the knowledge."[117]

2. ***Apprenticeship***

The concept of apprenticeship applies far more precisely to Tamar in the novel than to her male counterpart in the tale. Assaf is on school holiday,

without any apparent pressure to undergo a rite-of-passage, until his assignment to find the dog's owner arises. It does become his all-encompassing passion. But it is a spontaneous apprenticeship, its direction unpredictable. The shaping of his burgeoning sense of identity is metaphorically reflected in the fluid way he darts this way and that, following Dinka's lead. Yet each encounter with the strange circle of people who make up Tamar's world emboldens Assaf to face his fears, and reinforces his sense of self-worth. His worst terror – physical confrontation and pain – becomes his bravest moment to date. His encounter with the three thugs outside the old ruins in the valley allows Assaf finally to "cross beyond fear."[118] This struggle leads him firstly to an important discovery about Tamar's identity, her backpack at the Egged Bus Station Baggage Check. Secondly it enables him to continue with less apprehension in the face of physical confrontation on his picaresque route. (The backpack can be read as a metonym for identity. What could a person pack and take along that would denote all that is essential in the representation and containment of individuality?)

Tamar's apprenticeship is linked to her ability to sing well. She reminisces on the time spent in training with her beloved coach, Halina, and dreams of her true vocation as singer and soloist with her choral group. However, she grows and learns from life as she applies these original lessons to the conditions under which she must later sing in public. Her full range of emotions is presented as conduit to the facets of identity she discovers about herself, punctuated by the choice of songs, amongst others: "Stupid, Stupid, Stupid", "The Flute" based on the poem by Leah Goldberg, and "Stabat Mater", supreme song of female sadness.

The epigraph of the novel in the Hebrew edition – "*HaTsel Sheli Va-Ani Yatsanu LaDerech*" "הצל שלי ואני יצאנו לדרך" (My Shadow and I Went Out One Day) by Yehuda Poliker – connects the two protagonists to one other, as alter-egos, and to Dinka, in a play of shadows.[119]

3. *Overcoming Wilful Errors*

In Someone to Run With, juvenile impulses are readily absorbed by the process of formation of character for the two protagonists. The concept of error relates far more to the secondary characters, as discussed below. Tamar in particular facilitates the rehabilitation of those around her as they counteract their errors. Rehabilitation is the essence of rebuilding identity, re-growth arising from understanding of error – wilful or simply neglectful – and the clarity of acquired wisdom: re-*Bildung* in this case. Tamar's empathy towards her friends enhances their confidence and power to overcome error and adversity.

4. *Understanding of Life from a Conscious Self-culture*

The unfolding of the plot of this novel illustrates unambiguously how both protagonists begin to determine their own destinies. Assaf completes the process of *Bildung* as he develops confidence to pursue self-culture actively, rather than wait for events to reach him. Although resolute about her mission from the outset, Tamar learns resilience in handling unforeseen obstacles.

A key factor in achieving maturity through *Bildung* is the ability to look at the world as a detached observer.[120] Tamar's writing of her diary has empowered her to plunge into her deepest feelings, at the same time as

allowing her to stand back. Whilst rereading her diary, "she stopped and tried to remember just why she was writing about herself in the third person. She smiled, sorrowfully: it came back to her, the insane training she had forced herself to endure back then, to toughen herself up, give her thicker skin...– writing in the third person was part of it."[121] Assaf, too, re-appraises and observes himself in the midst of some of his most chaotic adventures:

> "But something in his heart contracted a little at these thoughts... Perhaps it was because he felt that if he gave up on this whole thing right now and brought Dinka back... if he did that he would not only be giving up the possibility of seeing, just once, what she looked like, this Tamar, but he might, you could say, actually be abandoning her."[122]

Tamar's diary becomes Assaf's window to her soul. When Tamar realised she must leave behind her diaries for the next part of her mission, she felt bereft, her identity under threat. "But what would she do without it? How would she understand herself without writing in it?"[123] When Assaf does eventually locate the diaries, the final volume is missing. The message seems to be that ultimately one cannot learn everything about another person through the written word alone. Only direct contact can validate the mutual sense of identity within the relationship between two people.

5. *Initiation into the Brotherhood of the Elect*

In the late 1990s of Assaf's world, there is no mention in the text of youth groups and pioneering expeditions. Grossman's young people struggle against enemies common to adolescents in every modern society: self-confidence amongst peers, the drug culture and its social and criminal elements. These battles are conducted across different levels of society, not

between them. There is a change from the intensely individual preoccupations of Aron set against a socialist ethos, to the more universal concerns of a society fraught with misleading temptations and empty hero-worship. Once again the values and qualities that a society acknowledges and respects are brought into question.[124] There is a development from the Zionist youth leader as one sort of hero, in the first novel, to a practical, at once street-smart and understanding hero-type, as represented by Assaf's mentor, Rhino, in the second. This reflects a change in Israeli society at large: away from a spirit of collectivism, and the Labour Zionist apparent certainties of the state's early years, towards a society more based on consumerism and respect for individual choices.

But peer pressure to conform continues to exist, and particularly adherence to the diktats issued by self-styled leaders of social peer groups. Assaf seems to pursue his individual passions (his photography) or to struggle with obeying the rules of social interaction (as determined by Roi, his childhood friend who has now become self-serving and dictatorial). The brotherhood of the elect, as defined by Roi, is ultimately unworthy of Assaf's allegiance. The process of *Bildung* for Assaf involves extricating himself from Roi's sphere of influence and power, and finding the segment of social interaction deserving of his commitment. Gradually Assaf understands, through his conversations with his older mentors, Theodora and Rhino, how best to endure the tribulations of adolescence, to be honest and true to his sense of self.

Tamar belongs to an elite group by virtue of her exquisite voice. Because of her exceptional talents she associates with other gifted people. Her position had seemed secure in the framework of singing training, guidance and

friendship offered by the chorus and all its activities, by her voice coach Halina, and by her two closest friends from the choir group, Idan and Adi. Yet she must leave the one group in order to enter the next: the seamy subculture of musicians and artists that her brother Shai has joined. She is tested anew, not simply for the quality of her voice, but for her commitment to her mission and her tenacity to follow through her plans, even in the most adverse conditions. Tamar's identity is scrutinised – by the fellow artists who suffer similar loneliness and humiliation through the rituals of performance, and by the ringleader, Pesach, who tries to fathom her: "I still don't know what you're doing here. Got me? ... I have a sixth sense and I'm feeling it about you..."[125]

Yet the most important test is the one that she herself conducts on her deepest sense of identity, her own inner strength: "Layer by layer, she peeled off the rough skin of her disappointments, the sobering realizations, until she reached the place where there was nothing left covering her, the bare kernel of herself."[126] Grossman often uses this image in his writing to portray the essence of true identity – integrity and honesty. Tamar is seeking a twofold result to validate her self-worth in this confrontation with adversity. She resolves never to allow her singing to be contaminated (to preserve her artistic purity) and never to flounder in her purpose of saving Shai (to preserve her moral integrity) despite the personal hardships involved.

6. *Hero as Artist*

Tamar's persona is that of an artist, of a singer with undeniable talent and purity of voice. In the true fashion of a *Bildungsroman* hero, her artistry undergoes various tests: she must subject herself to performing in a completely

different arena from the pristine and elite realm for which she originally trained. Out on public squares along the length and breadth of Israel, she must continue to seduce the raw public, and maintain her artistic integrity, without surrendering to any sense of self-humiliation.

7. ***Sensitivity to the Suffering of Others***

Tamar's entire purpose is to rescue her brother from his life of addiction. Along her journey she befriends people who clearly have suffered from their lot in life – Tamar's contact with them seems to lead them on to choices that will enrich their lives, whilst allowing her to gain from their experiences. Her own loneliness as a child, and her sense that her family has failed her, alerts her to this resonance in the lives of others: Theodora, Leah, Victorious and Sheli.

8. ***Role Model of Father***

A significant difference between the two male protagonists, Aron and Assaf, lies in the way their two families are constructed. Assaf's parents have become modern, well adjusted Israelis, with a healthy attitude to bringing up their children: they are nurturing and perceptive, encouraging of their children's independence. Yet for the purpose of the *Bildungsroman* hero, they are absent parents (away visiting his sister in America) and Assaf must turn elsewhere for mentors when faced with crisis. The term "father" is metonym for "family" in both Tamar and Assaf's situations: the parent body acts as a single unit, and the influences of mother and father are not sufficiently different to treat them separately in this analysis. However the contrast

between Aron's archetypal overbearing mother (from The Book of Intimate Grammar) and Assaf's reassuring, insightful mother is stark. The sense of insecurity or empowerment that results from the Mother-Son relationship is reflected in their approach to the opposite sex.

Tamar's parents are frequently described as being servants to appearances, people who misunderstand and confuse the true value of parenting. When she thinks of them, she is heartbroken, overwhelmed by "the sorrow of the irreparable, profound mistake that was her family: four lonely people, four people in the world, each saving his own soul."[127] Ultimately Tamar educates *them* to swallow their pride and "dig down deep". Working together with Assaf she facilitates their access to the core instincts required to help rehabilitate Shai.

9. ***City as Liberation or Corruption***

Originally the city contributes to corruption (in the example of Shai) but ultimately to liberation (Assaf and Tamar embrace its very multiplicity to achieve their mission). In Dickensian mode Grossman has surrounded his protagonists with a sinister array of characters: Pesach and his unsavoury group of underworld gangsters. Jerusalem is described in all its richness and diversity as the protagonists constantly traverse its streets, by contrast with Aron's indifferent city. The author traces for the reader a map of the city. The role of guide is played by Dinka, conducting Assaf at breakneck speed to all the characters who have significantly contributed to Tamar's *Bildung* on her route to self-realisation.[128]

10. ***Question of Love***

Recognition of one's core sexuality is intrinsic to the pursuit of adolescent identity. Grossman poses this challenge to his two protagonists. During Assaf's struggle with the three thugs at the swimming pool they call him "sister", "sugar", "faggot", and "dwarf"; his voice becomes squeaky from pain and tension. All his masculine abilities seem to fail him. It is a time of doubt and confusion for him about his sexuality, as he is being taunted by the malicious bullies. But ultimately his sheer courage as he "crosses beyond fear" overwhelms the brute force of his opponents, reducing their aggressiveness, leading them to abandon the battle.[129] This is the manifestation of the underlying principle of all Grossman's works: that individual moral tenacity has a humanising influence on others, despite difference and irrespective of physical power.

Tamar changes into rough torn overalls for her mission, leaving behind all feminine apparel. She needs to abandon all awareness of romance and tenderness "Any thoughts of love or intimacy seemed dangerous to her now."[130] The sheer self-motivation of this assignment buoys her on; it is undertaken without her parents' knowledge, wrapped up as they are in their own superficial concerns. Only when her toughest assignment seems close to completion does she miss her feminine curls and relax her guard: "Her body was starting to move as if it were playing out some role in an ancient ritual, or in a dance whose rules had been prearranged, millions of years in advance, and were out of her control."[131]

Assaf too senses a self-awareness that seems quite unfamiliar: "Things started moving inside Assaf in a new and confusing rhythm; in his soul, in his

body, he felt the wild notion that some new tenant was now breaking into him, immediately starting to *furnish* him inside at a wild tempo... bringing in something light, airy, flexible..."[132] At once primeval and completely contemporary, the ritual of falling in love, of finding connections between two people that override all their inhibitions, is elating for the protagonists. Their experiences on life's journey encompass both the title of the book, and its final sentence, giving Assaf and Tamar "someone to run with" and someone to "feel comfortable being silent with".

11. *Unpredictable Vitality of Life*

The strength that comes from "flashes of sudden insight"[133] in this novel translates as resilience, the ability to fend off assaults to one's core identity. Vitality combines with the courage and spontaneity of youth to propel the protagonists along their chosen courses, as befits the successful *Bildungsroman* hero.

Assaf's pathway through adolescence is signposted by the progression of names and monikers people use for him: his so-called friend Roi calls him "Zero", and the ruffians call him "sister". His mother calls him "my teddy bear"; his father uses the diminutive "Assafi". He moves through the different personas the names encode, from nothingness to childishness to robust maturity. Again Grossman's enduring fascination with made-up language and neologisms is apparent; or, more philosophically, with words as moulding the reality they describe.

B. Factors that contrast the hero and the heroine of the *Bildungsroman* and Grossman's treatment of the feminine instinct

New processes come into play with our analysis of the heroine Tamar. Esther Kleinbord Labovitz presents a different set of criteria for evaluating the heroine of the *Bildungsroman* in her work The Myth of the Heroine – the Female *Bildungsroman* in the Twentieth Century. The heroine's progress differs from the typical progress of the male hero (as set out by Buckley above), because the end goal of self-definition and wholeness of identity is not equivalent. Labovitz identifies the recurring themes in the female *Bildungsroman*. The following points intersect with those for the male in this context: "self-realization (including identity questions, self-discovery, and self-knowledge); sex roles (including male/female roles and role models); education; inner and outer directedness (psychological, sexual, ideological, and societal); career; philosophical questions; and autobiographical elements." These themes relate to "the heroine's personal quest, which manifests itself either as a social or a spiritual quest."[134]

Labovitz highlights a major difference between the end point and resolution of the female *Bildungsroman*, as contrasted with a male *Bildungsroman*. The normal conclusion of the male *Bildungsroman*, where the hero arrives at "momentous decisions concerning career and his future" occurs whilst the hero is still a young adult. In contrast, "the female heroine was seen to delay her direction in life, while the age limit was extended by each author well beyond early adulthood into middle age. This decision, in turn, was to raise burning questions about the developmental process of self for the heroine

and for women, in general."[135] This is true, despite changing expectations of women's role in society during the development of this novelistic style.

Tamar's tale of progress concludes with her various achievements: salvaging Shai, reconnecting her parents with him, respecting her artistic integrity, and finding a soul-mate, someone with whom she has shared her deepest problems. It is open-ended in the sense that the choices she will make with growing maturity are not delineated. Hence Tamar does not fully exemplify the notion of the female *Bildungsroman* heroine. Grossman in fact coalesces two characters into one joint construct. Together, Tamar along with another female character Leah, fulfil the qualities discussed by Labovitz. An overview of the female characters in this novel will shed further light on Grossman's representation of feminine instinct in this novel.

Leah is the most significant secondary character in the book. Her persona is affiliated to the facets of identity under observation: the drug culture and the toll it takes; overcoming adversity; realising one's true nature and potential; taking responsibility for structuring one's own life. Like Shai, she once participated in the world of narcotics and suffered gravely for it. Her face bears the ugly scars from the battle to extricate herself from this underworld. The vibrant restaurant she now runs is evidence of her power to overcome adversity, to take on "manly" responsibility; her response to a rude client reinforces this element of masculine aggression she exhibits. "Leah crossed her strong arms across her chest... 'What's the trouble, buddy?'" Yet she has metamorphosised from an androgynous, rather masculine being into a feminine, maternal woman:

> "Leah had told her (Tamar) when they first started becoming close: that in the world of her former incarnation, the one she lived in until she was about thirty, she was hardly a woman. 'They treated me with respect there,' Leah said. 'But they treated me like a guy, not like a woman. I didn't feel like a woman then, never. And when I was a kid, I wasn't really a little girl, and I didn't grow up into a big girl, and not a woman, and not a mother. There was no woman in me until now. Now, at the age of forty-five, because of Noa.'"[136] (Noa is her daughter)

Towards Tamar, Leah combines the advantages of her androgynous personality: she gave Tamar "the best hug, motherly and fatherly, that she could."[137] Her femininity emerges in the love and nurturing of her daughter, Noa. "'There's no other mother like you in the world!'"[138] Tamar says to validate Leah during the latter's moment of despair. Leah's warmth towards both Tamar and Assaf reinforces the concept of feminine instinct. Leah respects and relies on the response of her four-year-old daughter Noa towards people as a touchstone of sixth-sense intuition in order to evaluate genuine generosity of spirit.

Grossman plays with the feminine signifiers of Tamar's persona too. Despite frequent references to her pretty dark curls, the single most powerful measure she takes on the road to *Bildung* is to shave her head. This action (at a barber rather than at a hairdresser) leaves her feeling naked and raw; it undermines the boundary between masculine and feminine appearance. For Tamar and Leah their femininity is concealed and deflected en route to their self-fulfilment, to the point of androgyny on several occasions.

However Grossman never underestimates the power of feminine instinct in his female characters: Tamar, Leah; Assaf's mother, Theodora, Halina, Noa, even Dinka. Theodora is a new character in the Grossman repertoire. A devout Christian, isolated in her tower in a hermetic world of words and books, she nevertheless has an astute understanding of life's way. Her genuinely catholic interests have a resonance for both Assaf and Tamar, and the reciprocal affection generated between this old-world nun and her young companions embolden each one of them to realise his and her ambitions. She offers Assaf the possibility of understanding true friendship, and therefore helps him to shake off Roi's oppressive demands. In the final pages she confronts her own ghosts and sheds her lifelong inhibitions. She sallies out into the real world, to embrace her future.

Tamar reaffirms the significance of the key women in her life: "Leah, Halina, and Theo. Her three girl friends. Her three mothers. *Theo is the mother of the brain*, she once wrote in her diary, *Leah, of the heart, and Halina, of the voice*."[139] Since there clearly cannot be an autobiographical quotient in Grossman's relationship to his heroines, he has needed to rephrase their identity in these androgynous terms to better represent them. Equally, instinct is seen as being part of the female arena, sometimes shared by males with heightened perceptual abilities.

Grossman returns to focus more intensely on the female persona in his latest collection of two novellas בגוף אני מביטה, 2002. The provisional title is Inside Another Person; although the book has not as yet been translated into English. The Hebrew title is taken from the second novella and is written in the first person *feminine*.

C. The Significance of Dinka the Dog

Few contemporary novels give such prominence to a dog as instrument in the plot development. As the strong trust between the protagonists and Dinka emerges, it is relevant to question what the dog represents. From Assaf's first encounter with the animal in the city kennels there is a strong connection between them; they "speak quietly." Assaf asks "Why are you going so crazy?" Dinka seems to say "in a completely human voice, Oh yeah? You're not exactly a model of sanity yourself."[140] In the Hebrew original the word for crazy - משוגע– *meshuga* – is used.

S.Y. Agnon's novel, Only Yesterday, contains the archetypal major role for a dog in literature; in this case he is known as "Crazy Dog" or "Balak" an inversion of the letters for "dog" K-L-B [ב- ל– כ][141]. Instead of the idea of arbitrary identity (these words are literally inscribed on the animal by Yitzhak Kummer in Only Yesterday) Grossman emphasises the power and almost human qualities contained in Dinka's animal instinct.

Agnon's novel is an altogether more critical and extensive work, exploring secular life and values – and their failure – compared to traditional religious ones. Grossman has constructed a *Bildungsroman* adventure, and as he affirmed "a more generous, happier work" than some of his previous novels.[142] In both works the dog's relationship with the characters he encounters on his route through Jerusalem determines the denouement of the novel.

The critic Anne Golomb Hoffman discusses the depth of the work in Only Yesterday, "as texts (canine, talmudic homiletic) run amok".[143] She

draws attention to the dog as "walking text"[144]. Dinka, conducting Assaf at breakneck speed through Jerusalem, is also tracing out a map of the city.

A further contrast is evident in the symbolism of the dog in the two books: the dog in Only Yesterday represents the "split in Yitzhak's personality" as he tries to abandon his new life and return to his roots.[145] In contrast Dinka represents the pathway that will unify Assaf and Tamar as their experiences begin to intersect and overlap. The "Crazy Dog" in Agnon spells out the volatility of identity determined by irrational fear and panicked response, leading to a pointless and unpleasant death. Conversely Dinka "stitches" Assaf and Tamar together, revealing the triumph of natural instinct and intuition. Shaked refers to the hermeneutic code in Agnon's novel as being "the secret of the analogy between dog and man": in Yitzhak's case his connection with the dog brought him to his death.

If the hermeneutic code (understanding the riddle of the text) is presented similarly in Grossman's novel, the connection between dog and man brings vitalising energy to Assaf. He is wrenched out of stagnant isolation into adventures that illuminate his humanism, his compassion and ultimately his *praxis*. Dinka's instinctive ability to communicate leads Assaf to appreciate his own worth, and his capacity to forge relationships, important accomplishments for the *Bildungsroman* hero.

Dinka furthermore helps Tamar maintain her courage at the most insupportable moments, serving as a life-giving force during her most demeaning ordeals on the street. At one point Tamar believes Dinka has been sacrificed in order to complete her mission, the recovery of her brother Shai. Yet the story turns out otherwise: Dinka serves to help Tamar find "the missing

Lego link" which enables the young girl not only to accomplish her social and family quest for the benefit of others, but to perceive the possibility of a rewarding intimate relationship with someone who can understand her inner spirit (Assaf). The major presence of Dinka and her success in uniting the two protagonists reinforce Grossman's belief in the power of instinct and intuition in shaping identity.

CONCLUSION

Moretti clarifies the need for the *Bildungsroman* hero to affirm his sense of self and, within his recently created identity, the ethical standards of right and wrong. For this reason there is frequently a legal factor in the outcome of the *Bildungsroman*.[146] This is certainly the case in Someone to Run With, where the police arrive to arrest Pesach and his thugs. The element of legal intervention in turn allows Tamar and Assaf to complete their undertaking to salvage Shai, and rehabilitate him within family and society. There is a conclusive ending, resulting in the separation of good and evil. The demarcations are clear in Someone to Run With, which confirm it as a contemporary *Bildungsroman*. However The Book of Intimate Grammar as anti-*Bildungsroman* is far more ambiguous.

Earlier, in my analysis of the conclusion to The Book of Intimate Grammar, I presented a discussion of Grossman's reaching out to the reader to salvage Aron[147]. Moretti reflects the way such ambiguity presents itself:

> "...the world has meaning *only if* it is relentlessly divided into good and evil. ...If the oppositional paradigm, for whatever reason, loses its clarity, the result is an out and out *paralysis of judgement*, making it impossible to deal with those ambiguous situations or questionable behaviours which, in

adult life and in the ordinary course of events, are by far the most prevalent."[148]

Grossman has presented one novel where the protagonist emerges with a negative *weltanschauung*, and a second where the protagonists' experiences result in a positive one. The "journey" of these protagonists between childhood and maturity is a metaphor for youth. But Aron's journey is incomplete, and his self-made identity still conflicts with his inherited one. He continues to suffer the "paralysis of judgement" which keeps him locked inside his inner world. This paralysis is the ultimate frustration of the traditional *Bildungsroman* process. Whereas Assaf's achievement of a positive world view fulfils the definition of the *Bildungsroman* given at the start of this chapter by Gohlman: "At the heart of it lies the notion of the individual in contact with a world whose meaning must be shaped and reshaped from within up to the point when the hero is in a position to say 'I think I can live with it now'."[149]

ENDNOTES

[1] R. M. Rilke, Letters to a Young Poet, translated by Stephen Mitchell (New York, 1986), 39-40. This epigraph, surprisingly, was used only in the Hebrew text, and omitted from the English translation of the book.

[2] David Grossman, The Book of Intimate Grammar, translated by Betsy Rosenberg (London, 1994). Hereafter Intimate Grammar

--- *Sefer Hadikduk HaPenimi* ספר הדקדוק הפנימי (Tel Aviv, 1991).

[3] The collection of essays Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman edited by James Hardin (Columbia, South Carolina, 1991) provides a history of the genre, and the problems in describing it. I do not aim to discuss all the parameters of the development and usage of the term, but rather to distil the theory of the*Bildungsroman* from a selection of prominent sources, and apply its key characteristics to evaluate the two works under discussion in this chapter. A brief discussion on the *Bildungsroman* follows in the next paragraphs, and further analysis in section A – The *Bildungsroman* and its evolution as a 20th (and 21st) century genre, see p140 below.

[4] David Grossman, Duel, translated by Betsy Rosenberg (London 1998).

■*Du-Krav* דו-קרב (Tel Aviv, 1982).

■See Under: Love, translated by Betsy Rosenberg (London, 1990).

■*Ayen Erech: Ahavah* עיין ערך: אהבה (Jerusalem, 1986).

■The Zigzag Kid, translated by Betsy Rosenberg (London, 1997).

■*Yesh Yeladim Zig-zag* יש ילדים וזגזג (Tel Aviv, 1994).

■Someone to Run With, translated by Vered Almog and Maya Gurantz (London, 2003). Hereafter Someone to Run With

■*Mishehu Larutz Ito* מישהו לרוץ אתו (Tel Aviv, 2000).

[5] Charles Dickens, David Copperfield, in Franco Moretti, The Way of the World – The *Bildungsroman* in European Culture, new edition (London, 2000), 182. Hereafter Moretti, Way of the World.

[6] Naomi B. Sokoloff, Imagining the Child in Modern Jewish Fiction (Baltimore, 1992). Hereafter Sokoloff, Imagining the Child, ix.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Moretti, Way of the World, 185.

[9] Encyclopaedia Britannica, 15th ed. Micropaedia vol 11 (Chicago, 1975), 16.

[10] Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, was originally published in German in 1796, and translated into English as Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship by Carlyle in 1824.

[11] Francois Jost, "Variations of a Species: the Bildungsroman", Symposium 37:2 (Summer 1983), 125, 144. Hereafter Jost, Variations of a Species.

[12] Moretti, Way of the World, 242-4.

[13] Jost, "Variations of a Species", 144.

[14] By 'protean' here I mean a genre that assumes different appearances: The Book of Intimate Grammar contains elements of both anti-Bildungsroman (as regards the primary character Aron) and Bildungsroman (as regards the secondary character Gideon). I allude to this paradox here, but expand on this later on p169-171.

[15] Susan Ashley Gohlman, Starting Over – the Task of the Protagonist in the Contemporary Bildungsroman (London, 1990), 25. Hereafter Gohlman, Starting Over.

[16] These key themes as signposts for the Bildungsroman are from Jerome H. Buckley, Season of Youth: the Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding (Cambridge, MA, 1974). Hereafter Buckley, Season of Youth. In his comprehensive introduction he sets out the requisite features that constitute the Bildungsroman from Goethe through the 20th Century.

[17] Buckley, Season of Youth, 1. Quoting Keats, Buckley highlights the moment of adolescence when all seems bewildering and one's identity confused: ' "The imagination of a boy is healthy, and the mature imagination of a man is healthy; but there is a space of life between, in which the soul is in a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted..."'

[18] Intimate Grammar, 341.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] At age thirteen a Jewish boy is called to read from the Torah in the public arena of the Synagogue. He thereby gains admission as an adult member of his religious community.

[22] A complete contrast can be seen in the example of Blood Libels by Clive Sinclair. Bizarre and grotesque aspects of the ritual of the *bar mitzvah* are emphasised in order to question its intrinsic value. All sacrosanct tradition is overturned as the Rabbi is depicted in hot sexual pursuit of Helga, the family's *au pair*, during the *bar mitzvah* celebrations. Clive Sinclair, Blood Libels (London, 1986), 8.

[23] For Aron's parents I have used the names as given in the English version – "Mama" and "Papa".

[24] Intimate Grammar, 19-20.

[25] Ibid, 20.

[26] Ibid, 22.

[27] Ibid, 26.

[28] Ibid, 25.

[29] Moretti, Way of the World, 239. Moretti evaluates those novels which are counter-Bildungsroman, with particular focus on the representation of dinners, for example Amerika by Franz Kafka, and Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man by James Joyce.

[30] Ibid, 26-7. The *bar mitzvah* reading consists of a portion of the Torah, or Five Books of Moses, which is then followed by an associated portion from one of the remaining 19 books of the Bible, called the *Haphtarah*.

[31] Isaiah VI: 6.

[32] Intimate Grammar, 293.

[33] David Grossman has conceded in a public lecture, that some critics see his use of the identical passage as homage to Henry Roth; Grossman was however intensely familiar with it since it was his own *bar mitzvah* portion. Brighton Festival, 11-05-1996.

[34] Henry Roth, Call it Sleep (London, 1977), 228 (originally published in the USA, 1934). Hereafter Roth, Sleep.

[35] Intimate Grammar 109-110.

[36] Ibid, 121.

[37] Ibid, 118.

[38] Ibid, 293.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid, 226-8.

[41] *Sefer HaDikduk HaPenimi*, 41.

Intimate Grammar, 36.

[42] Ibid, 25.

[43] In the chapter "The Comfort of Civilisations", in The Way of the World, Franco Moretti explores the values and meaning the Bildungsroman protagonist would attribute to each episode of experience, and how he should accept the deferment of the ultimate meaning of his existence.

[44] Moretti, Way of the World, 147.

It is possible to draw parallels between Aron and Oskar, the diminutive protagonist in Günter Grass's The Tin Drum, particularly in relation to Oskar's wilful decision to cease growing. Gunter Grass, The Tin Drum (London, 1989). However, The Tin Drum was written as an allegory to explore the phenomenon of Nazism and its arbitrary cruelty; it explores the concept of the heroic, or signifies its decline, as David H. Miles has illustrated David H. Miles, "Kafka's hapless Pilgrims and Grass's Scurrilous Dwarf: Notes on Representative Figures in the Anti-Bildungsroman", Monatshefte, Vol. 65, No. 4 (1973), 344-5. Hereafter Miles, Representative Figures in the Anti-Bildungsroman. Oskar's "voluptuous delight in sin and blasphemy" and his determined "regression to the compulsive child in man" are altogether more sinister and nihilistic than Aron's imaginary misdemeanours, and physical or emotional insubordination. The Tin Drum has greater resonance with Grossman's work on Holocaust fiction, See under: Love.

[45] Intimate Grammar, 294.

[46] Ibid, 295

[47] Moretti, Way of the World, 231.

[48] Intimate Grammar, 294-5. The quotes from these two pages illustrate Aron's chaotic mind-set as his interior monologue shifts frantically from first person to third person narrative.

[49] Buckley, Season, 12.

[50] R.W.B. Lewis, The Picaresque Saint quoted by Miles, Representative Figures in the Anti-Bildungsroman, 346.

[51] Intimate Grammar, 243.

[52] Ibid.

[53] *Pareveh* means neutral; in Jewish culinary terms it means neither milk nor meat.

[54] Ibid, 297.

[55] Ibid, 244.

[56] Ibid, 245

[57] Ibid, 336.

[58] Ibid, 47.

[59] Ibid 219.

[60] The semi-automatic links between the two books are evident by the titles that have emerged in articles on "The Book of Intimate Grammar": Gershon Shaked, "Portrait of a Young Artist from Jerusalem", Modern Hebrew Literature, NS 7 (Fall/Winter 1991), 43, hereafter Shaked, Artist from Jerusalem, and Rachel Felday Brenner, "The Grammar of the Portrait: the Construct of the Artist in David Grossman, 'The Book of Internal Grammar, and James Joyce,

'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man'", Comparative Literature Studies, vol. 31, no 3 (1994), 270.

[61] Buckley analyses the work in accordance with the traditions of the *Bildungsroman* I have been presenting in Buckley, Season of Youth, 225-247.

[62] See Point 7 corresponding to Someone to Run With, p187.

[63] Herman Kafka, as depicted in "Letter to his Father" by Franz Kafka, is the archetypal overbearing father in literature. Franz Kafka, Wedding Preparations in the Country and Other Stories, notes by Max Brod, translated by Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins. (London, 1987), 75.

[64] In her discussion of the imagination of the child in literary texts, Naomi Sokoloff highlights the convention of "orphaned protagonists" in the *Bildungsroman*, the fact of which "permits the young heroes to elect a patrimony, to choose their own mentors who may guide them into acceptance by society." Sokoloff, Imagining the Child, 180.

[65] Yocheved was the mother of Moses, Aron and Miriam in the bible; she was credited with greatness particularly by the resourcefulness with which she saved the baby Moses from Pharaoh's decree to put every new-born Jewish male to death.

[66] Grossman, Grammar, 270-1.

[67] Shelley Kleiman, Book Reviews: "A Book of Intimate Grammar" by David Grossman, Ariel, Jerusalem, Number 99-100 (1995), 158-9. Hereafter Kleiman, Book Review.

[68] Grossman, Grammar 181.

[69] Ibid, 138-9.

[70] Ibid, 176-7.

[71] Ibid, 181.

[72] Ibid, 217.

[73] Ibid, 263.

[74] Buckley, Season of Youth, 20.

[75] Shaked, Artist from Jerusalem, 44.

The following quotation is from Eli Wiesel, the latter-day embodiment of a *Bildungsroman* hero, who forges a meaningful identity in society out of the cruellest of hardships. "Now more than ever, we must begin with Jerusalem, city of a thousand generations of men who dreamed of deliverance and paved the way for today's heroes, Jerusalem, ancient and renewed city bridging the beginning of beginnings and the end of time." Eli Wiesel, All Rivers Run to the Sea: Memoirs Vol. One 1928-1969 (London, 1996), 389, from his diary at the time of the Six Day War.

[76] W.H. Bruford, The German Tradition of Self-cultivation (London, 1975), 30.

[77] Grossman, Grammar, 230.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid, 241

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid, 253.

[82] Ibid, 255.

[83] Buckley, Season of Youth, 4.

[84] Moretti, Way of the World, 21.

[85] Grossman, Grammar, 151-2.

[86] Ibid, 13.

[87] Ibid, 150.

[88] Ibid, 326.

[89] Ibid, 268.

[90] Ibid, 277.

[91] Ibid, 280.

[92] Grossman, Grammar, 92

[93] F. Jost, "Variations of a Species", 135.

[94] Moretti, Way of the World, 198. The social and political background to Grossman's novels is discussed in more detail in the Introduction.

[95] Arthur Rimbaud, "Delires II, Alchimie du Verbe" in Selected Verse (London 1962), 327-30.

[96] Moretti, Way of the World, 242.

[97] M-J Whitaker, *La Structure du Monde Imaginaire de Rimbaud* (Paris, 1972), 180. The translation is my own.

[98] Grossman, Grammar, 202; *Sefer HaDikduk Hapenimi*, 196.

[99] Moretti, Way of the World, 234. Moretti also refers to the phenomenon of World War I infantrymen suffering increasing fear of being wounded under fire whose favourite position was the foetal one.

[100] M.M. Bhaktin, The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays, edited by Michael Holquist. Translated by Daryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, Texas, 1998), 57.

[101] Moretti, Way of the World, 194.

[102] Grossman, Grammar, 311-2.

[103] Yoel Hoffmann, "*Katschen*" in The New Wave: an Anthology of Hebrew Short Stories 1985-1995 (in Hebrew). (Jerusalem, 1989). Also "Katschen" in The Book of Joseph, translated by Eddie Levenston and David Kriss (New York, 1999). Elements of the grotesque in The Book of Joseph have a resonance with Grossman's See Under: Love and are discussed in that chapter.

[104] Consider the response of the reviewers of his book: "A treat...", "without doubt David Grossman's greatest achievement so far." Kleiman, Book Review, 159, and "I envy anyone who has yet to read this book", Shaked, Artist from Jerusalem, 46.

[105] Brighton Festival, 11-05-1996.

[106] Miles, Representative Figures in the Anti-Bildungsroman, 341.

[107] Rilke, Letters, 23-4.

[108] Buckley, Season, 23-4.

[109] Erlich, Formalism, 201.

[110] I discuss this impact of Sholem Aleichem on Grossman in his formative years earlier, in Chapter Three, 97-98.

[111] David Grossman, "My Sholem Aleichem," Modern Hebrew Literature (Spring/Summer 1995), 5.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Buckley, Season, 6.

[114] In this position Grossman is following the traditions of earlier Hebrew fiction of the twentieth century, like that of Gnessin and Brenner. U.N Gnessin (1879-1913) described in his writing a psychological reality *avant la lettre*, reflected in his choice of images where nature mirrored the emotional turbulence of his protagonists and in his use of stream-of-consciousness. J.H. Brenner (1881-1921) illustrated in his writing how idealism fails to deal with everyday realities and hardships.

[115] David Grossman, *MiShehu Larutz Ito* (Israel, 2000). Hereafter *MiShehu* Someone to Run With, translated by Vered Almog and Maya Gurantz. (London 2003). Hereafter Someone to Run With.

[116] There is no change in typeface or chapter heading to denote the shift from the circumstances of Assaf to Tamara, simply a double-spacing between paragraphs. The book's lively pace is partly accounted for by the immediacy of their juxtaposition.

[117] Esther Kleinbord Labovitz, The Myth of the Heroine – The Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century, 2nd Edition (New York, 1986), 175. Hereafter Labovitz, Myth of the Heroine. I analyse the theoretical differences between male and female heroes of the *Bildungsroman* in more detail in Section B p189 below.

[118] Someone to Run With, 224.

[119] *MiShehu*, 7. This epigraph is omitted entirely from the English edition, as are chapter headings in the form of song titles.

[120] Labovitz, Myth of the Heroine, 158.

[121] Someone to Run With, 40.

[122] Ibid, 111.

[123] Someone to Run With, 44.

[124] R.W.B. Lewis, The Picaresque Saint – Representative Figures in Contemporary Fiction (Philadelphia, 1959), 30-31.

[125] Someone to Run With, 254.

[126] Ibid, 265.

[127] Ibid, 261.

[128] As a result of the popularity of the book there is now a tour in Jerusalem that traces the routes taken by the protagonists during the course of their adventures.

[129] Ibid, 219-228.

[130] Ibid, 59.

[131] Ibid, 331.

[132] Ibid, 329.

[133] See point 11, p165 above.

[134] Labovitz, Myth of the Heroine, 8.

[135] Ibid, 247.

[136] Someone to Run With, 57-8.

[137] Ibid, 62.

[138] Ibid, 58-9.

[139] Ibid, 252.

[140] Ibid, 6-7.

[141] This includes several permutations of the name, as it is read from left to right or right to left by different characters in the Hebrew text. S.Y. Agnon, Only Yesterday, translated by Barbara Harshav (Princeton NJ, 2000), 287. The Hebrew original, תמול שלשום was published in 1945.

[142] David Grossman, "George Webber Memorial Lecture" at Jewish Book Week, London, 08-03-2003.

[143] Anne Golomb Hoffman "'Mad Dog' and Denouement in *Temol Shilshom*" in David Patterson and Glenda Abramson (eds.), Tradition and Trauma – Studies in the Fiction of S. J. Agnon (Oxford, 1994), 49.

[144] Ibid, 47.

[145] Gershon Shaked, Shmuel Yosef Agnon: A Revolutionary Traditionalist (New York, 1989), 148.

[146] Moretti, Way of the World, 204.

[147] See Chapter Four, 174.

[148] Ibid, 187.

[149] Gohlman, Starting Over, 25.

CHAPTER FIVE

"I Wrote a Letter to My Love..."

Epistolary Fiction in

Be My Knife

"We could be like two people who inject themselves with truth serum and at long last have to tell it, the truth. I want to be able to say to myself, "I bled truth with her," yes, that's what I want. Be a knife for me, and I, I swear, will be a knife for you: sharp but compassionate..."(Yair)[1]

"Nor is it perhaps really love when I say that for me you are the most beloved; love is to me that you are the knife which I turn within myself." (Kafka - Letters to Milena,)[2]

"What wouldn't I give now, to read Milena's lost letters to K.? To see, for instance, with what exact words she responded to his 'love is that you are my knife with which I dig deeply into myself.'

I hope she immediately sent him a telegram in which she made it clear that a person must never, not ever, agree to be anyone else's knife. You mustn't even ask such a thing of someone.

On second thought, I actually don't understand Milena at all. If I were Milena, I'd have behaved differently..." (Miriam)[3]**.**

These are the quotes that link Kafka's Letters to Milena to David Grossman's epistolary novel Be My Knife. Letters to Milena is a collection of letters written during 1922 and 1923 by Franz Kafka to Milena Jesenska, translator of his early prose. Theirs was a passionate yet non-physical relationship, a real-life situation evidenced in the collection of letters; the collection does not include Milena's own letters, of which no trace remains.

Be My Knife appeared in Hebrew in 1998, and in translation into English in 2002.

Two distinct issues arise in this discussion of epistolarity:

A. The strategy and motive for accentuating epistolarity and its form as dialogic amorous discourse. Grossman employs and manipulates the tenets of epistolarity.

B. The profound importance of intertext, and the connections that Grossman makes in this work, notably but not only in Letters to Milena. Closer reading uncovers a dialogue with these significant intertexts that creates new meaning.

Grossman's sophisticated narrative technique uses letters unfolding in the text to conceal and reveal writer and reader: Who is presenting the letters and who is their custodian? The genre of epistolary fiction foregrounds the intimacy of the relationships in a one-sided dialogism.

Be My Knife is a story in three sections. The first section comprises Yair's letters to Miriam, which he begins writing after seeing her at a school reunion. In section two Miriam's responses are collected once Yair has stopped writing to her, withdrawn partly from her diary entries, and partly from letters sent. The final section employs a distinct typographical differentiation of the two speakers. It is the conversation they finally conduct by telephone and in their consequent encounter in person. Until this last and shortest section, all communications are mono-dialogic.

Yair invites Miriam to write to him, to explore a unique relationship based on words alone. He invokes certain provisos for this liaison to work, the

most significant being that they are never to meet, and that they must adhere to a vow of total honesty in their writings. The book traces the course of these letters, illuminating the process of exposure and self-awareness the two protagonists undergo. Although Yair and Miriam do not meet until the final pages, their epistolary relationship impacts on both their lives as they seek voice and fulfilment, a reappraisal of identity, through their letters. Character is thereby explored, crafted and unravelled in multiple layers of discourse.

A. **Amorous Discourse and Epistolarity**

Be My Knife challenges many of the tenets of the genre of epistolary novel. As with Grossman's previous writing, this novel interacts with European and Israeli literature, in this instance in the framework of the epistolary novel. Grossman's response to Kafka emerges on the one hand, and to Shklovsky, Barthes and Derrida on the other hand. Grossman's Israeli precursors are an important point of reference.

Jacques Derrida claims that "the letter, the epistle is not one genre but all genres, literature itself."[4] Situated in the present it casts its eye both forwards and backwards in time. Applying this to Grossman's work, the time of writing is transitional in more than one respect – politically, and in relation to the process of his work. Politically the Oslo Peace Accords of 1992 brought the anticipation of a peaceful resolution after many years of conflict between Arab and Israeli. This hiatus of hope, in the year of Israel's 50th Jubilee of Statehood, allowed Grossman to internalise the quest for fulfilment and reconciliation in Be My Knife (published in the Hebrew in 1998). There is an

absence of direct historical particulars in the time of narration, too; the book is seemingly beyond historical time.[5]

Discussing the role of Lover, Barthes presents the view that "a person functions on several wavelengths...He is not 'depoliticized' in the sense that he is not fundamentally indifferent to what happens politically, but he has established a hierarchy within himself... his personal reality is his relation to the beloved, and the thousand incidents that affect it".[6]

The context of transition is also relevant in considering Grossman's mode of work. He is always seeking to grapple with new genre (as discussed more fully in the Introduction). The most evident transition here is the change from a child's world view to an adult one. Secondly the predominance of first person male protagonists in Grossman's work has been transformed into two distinct major protagonists, Yair and Miriam. (There is a less significant major role for Shosh in The Smile of the Lamb.[7])

We can cast an eye forward to Grossman's most recent book, published in Israel in June 2002: Inside Another Person is its provisional English title and in Hebrew: בגוף אני מבינה. This is a set of two novellas, the second giving its title to the collection. For Hebrew readers, of course, it is immediately striking that the second novella is written in the first person feminine: a major development for Grossman following his experiment with this technique in the character of Miriam in the work we are considering here. The original description of a Love Letter, of amorous discourse, presents the writer as desiring the absent beloved object.[8]

In Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form, Janet Gurkin Altman delineates the features of epistolary fiction, viewed from a semantic approach, and a

syntactic approach.[9] She defines epistolarity in terms of polarity and paradox, in six primary categories:

1. Inherent to the function of a letter is its purpose as bridge or barrier, its role as mediator between sender and receiver. The power of this tension is evident throughout the book as the vicissitudes between Yair and Miriam's wish to meet and their wish to remain apart develops.

2. Correspondence is essentially a question of confidences - the winning and losing of confidence. The balance between seduction and friendship, and between "portrait" and "mask", inform the plot in this novel.

3. The unique element of epistolary experience is the reciprocal nature of the writer and reader; the fictional reader is as important an agent as the fictional writer in the narrative. There is an epistolary pact, a call for response from a specific reader within the correspondent's world. To further expand upon the act of reading (portraying reading, rereading, proof readings) the letter is an instrument of revelation and discovery. This corresponds to the classical moment of recognition, of *anagnorisis,* in Aristotelian terms. For Yair it is a pivotal moment, as his first level of self-discovery leads to a second, more profound search. Miriam's discourse questions the nature of this pact, as her writing, originally seen as her letters of response, is later revealed to be her diary, with the resulting shift in format and in writer-reader relationship this entails.

There is an added element of the external reader (you and I) reading the novel. Grossman's literary strategy is to make the external reader construct the identity of Miriam, as her only voice in the long first section are her replies as reflected upon by Yair – "In your last letter you didn't smile, not once" or

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. You're right and I have nothing to say in my defence."[10] Co-opting the external reader into the process is a technique Grossman used in his major work on adolescent crisis and anxiety, The Book of Intimate Grammar.[11]

4. To write a letter is to map one's co-ordinates: temporal, spatial, emotional and intellectual. This involves not only defining oneself in relationship to a particular "you"; it is an attempt to draw that "you" into becoming the "I" of a new utterance. Epistolary discourse is coded: there is a sense of immediacy, a vibrant but precarious present, looking Janus-like both towards the past and the future. Yet epistolary dialogue is also a language of absence – writer and reader share neither time nor space. Memory and expectation keep the addressee present in the imagination of the writer. It is this concept of an **unseizable** present that will move the plot along in Be My Knife, towards a **tangible** present of telephone calls and interaction in person.

5. The dynamics of closure, so fertile a field of signification in epistolary fiction, affords Grossman his most inventive techniques. Closure has two major features: The first is stimulated by a renunciation of writing – reunion, termination of desire, or death. The second is characterised by open-endedness – thwarted desires and impenetrable silence. Grossman makes use of the first in Part One and the second in Part Two of this novel, leading to the dramatic shift to interactive dialogue in the third. Yair elects to cease writing: "Miriam – this is my last letter. I will most likely not write to you again" and "Enough Miriam, give up on me. It was all fantasy."[12] In contrast Miriam struggles with Yair's silences: "So this is it, isn't it? Our last chance. The last words.

The end of the story you began writing for us eight and something months ago. We didn't even have a full pregnancy."[13]

6. When probing the very make-up of the novel, the "epistolary mosaic", Grossman's sophistication becomes evident. The tension between continuity and discontinuity is initially confusing. Although there appears to be a clear chronological line in part one of the text, a "cyclical time" as Yair calls it, this is disrupted in part two. The disjunction of these two parts and the ellipses in narration lead us to probe the momentum of part three.

Ultimately the psychological action accounts for this final section, and here the clues are provided by the force of the intertext (the implied references to Kafka). This component of the book combines with the elements of epistolarity to illuminate its deeper meaning and to help us answer the question: is this a novel of amorous epistolary discourse? Or is Grossman returning through a sophisticated narrative technique to reappraise the parent-child relationship from the framework of the adult world view, an evolution from his child-centric novels, or, to re-phrase this, the *Bildungsroman* fiction of his earlier works?

Included in this collection of letters exploring inner truths, revealing secret fantasies and clamouring for a new form of pure, naked relationship is a different voyage of discovery. Grossman leads his protagonists to grapple with their inner being in a process of psychoanalytical searching. This is a quest for inner fulfilment and self-realisation that reaches further into the psyche than either protagonist originally understands, as the inner child becomes the focus of attention. Grossman's skill and originality emerge as the analysis and

literary detective work lead us from the intensities of love letters to another type of relationship, which lies at the heart of much of Grossman's writing.

Clearly every discussion of genre must reflect that it is a classification always adapting itself to evolving belief systems and *morés*. Linda Kauffman, a key critic in the field of epistolary fiction, emphasises the idea that literary forms adapt to and reflect social change during turbulent years.[14] She explains that every new example conducts a dialogue with the pre-existing company of sources, both augmenting and altering it.[15]

Influence of the Israeli Epistolary Tradition

The Israeli paradigm of a novel of mono-dialogic communication is Mister Mani, by A.B. Yehoshua, first published in 1990.[16] This novel has a strong historical and cultural focus, with the added narrative complexity of the novel working backwards in time. Yehoshua illuminates the account of a Sephardic family, the Manis, through his focus on the complexities of their family, social and political relationships, in the Middle East, from the Ottoman period onwards.

By contrast Grossman is exploring internal family dynamics; and when he does reach backwards in time, it is to a psychological reconciliation with his protagonist as child, with the formative influence of the child's experiences within the family. Yet there are distinct connections between Yehoshua and Grossman: Using very different structures and rhythms, both authors explore the father-son relationship as it impacts along the generations. But this is

hardly what Be My Knife seems to contend with at the outset... more detective work needs to be done...

A second key work in this genre is The Black Box, 1987, by Amos Oz.[17] Again the cultural and social background of the characters animate the plot: the weight of the differing Ashkenazi and Sephardic backgrounds of Ilana's first and second husbands determines their conduct. Each are compared and contrasted in their relationship with Ilana's son, Boaz, the epitome of the New Hebrew – young, virile, assertive and free-spirited. He is captivated by the Land and Nature, rather than being governed by Diasporic preoccupations of his two fathers: academic learning on the one hand (the heritage of his Ashkenazi father, Gideon) or fervent religiosity on the other (that of his Sephardi stepfather, Michel).

Yair in Be My Knife is neither strong nor handsome; by his own account, he is bookish and clearly introspective. He is quite disconnected from the hero of the Zionist metaplot – naturally powerful, proud and intuitive, with no guilt-ridden past or collective Diaspora memories. The connection between these two books lies in the internal search that Oz's professor, Gideon, begins to undertake as he seeks some fulfilment through his son, Boaz. In both Oz and Grossman, the male-female relationship is side-stepped for, or rather used as a stepping stone to, the compelling ontological question of the father-son relationship.

Minotaur by Benjamin Tammuz (1919 – 1989) is an epistolary novel in the form of a thriller.[18] Alexander Abramov, an Israeli born secret agent, begins a clandestine correspondence with Thea, a young English girl living in London. Despite the intense longing generated by these letters, and the

apparent growing urgency for both parties to meet, they never do establish direct contact. However, Abramov's letters produce a chain of events which encompass social and cultural history reaching beyond Israel into England and Europe. Other characters enter the epistolary domain, as Thea has several suitors who write to her. Mysterious events intrude with life and death consequences. This novel establishes many of the classic paradoxes and polarities of epistolarity described above. Confidence is challenged, or deliberately undermined, as identity is constantly questioned; "portrait" and "mask" are left unresolved; the epistolary pact between writer and reader comes under the spotlight. Since its growing tension is a significant feature of this adventure story, the external reader is drawn ever closer in. But Tammuz's novel develops in a different direction from Grossman's: Minotaur is a detective story and a novel of social history disguised as a novel of amorous discourse.

One of the earliest manifestations of epistolary fiction within the resurgence of Modern Hebrew and Yiddish literature is I.L. Peretz's story, "The Woman Mistress Hannah", from 1906. Peretz (1852 – 1915) uses letters, written and received by Mistress Hannah, and "found together... in the pocket of the mad Hannah" to trace the psychological decline into madness of a woman maltreated and deceived by family and friends.[19] This is a significant post-enlightenment social commentary; it is linked to Be My Knife through the exploration of psychological development (*avant la lettre* for Peretz). Hannah's position leaves her no way out of her downward spiral of alienation and loss, whereas Grossman's protagonists are finally able to confront their ghosts.[20]

Significantly, these examples of epistolary fiction in Modern Hebrew literature can be seen as paradigms for Elizabeth H. Cook's reflections: "At different historical moments of cultural transformation and political pressure when existing categories of public and private domains are being redefined along with the bodies that inhabit these spaces, the letter-form returns to the foreground of the cultural imagination."[21] This leads us to question why David Grossman should use epistolarity at this juncture of his writing. In Epistolary Bodies Cook revisits Ovid's *Heroïdes* to establish the foundation of letter-writing as "an attempt to reconstruct a phantasmic body that in some measure compensates for the writer's absence. In this sense, the body is always central to the letter-narrative."[22] Grossman's epigraph at the start of Be My Knife seems to reinforce this:

> "When the word turns into a body
> And the body opens its mouth
> And speaks the word from which
> It was created –
> I will embrace that body
> And lay it to rest by my side"[23]

However Yair, in one of his earliest letters to Miriam, invokes a relationship where they will never come face to face: "I'm really talking about letters only, not a meeting, never a body. No flesh, not with you... Only my words meeting yours, so we can feel the rhythm of our breath slowly becoming one."[24] As an imaginary force, Miriam can reflect Yair's psyche, and be his psychoanalytical referee. In his searching for his inner kernel, Yair

will strip away all the romantic notions of the present, to revisit the anxiety and pre-occupations of his past.

Lament for the beloved's absence is a major motivating factor of the amorous epistle. The writer typically challenges the beloved object to read the letter, whilst raging against the forces that separate them. The writer recalls past pleasures, speculates about infidelity and laments the beloved's indifference. And the writer discusses the sole act that engages him or her in their absence: writing. Yet Grossman again appears to subvert the genre, for Yair savours the forces that separate them. At the outset he refuses the option of telephone calls: "I won't call ... mainly because even a voice is too real for the hallucination I want to have with you. It can be created only with written words, and a voice might pierce it, and then the whole world of reality will flow inside."[25]

Paradoxically, Yair indulges his fantasy of sensual pleasures shared with Miriam, whilst continuing to insist they should never meet. Without the possibility of real union then, the question of infidelity cannot arise; the concept of indifference is more complex, since Yair does hang on her every letter, responding to every nuance. "About six days ago I sent a letter to you at school, as usual, and have not since received a reply. I suppose it is just a matter of time. Perhaps you are busy... Or perhaps there was something else that made you angry."[26]

As important as absence is in the motivation of amorous epistolary discourse, so is the illusive nature of fulfilment in its delivery. This is a process that captures desire as a continuous progression, something that can never be attained. Grossman pre-empts this constant yearning for physical

fulfilment: Yair establishes at the outset the ground rules of zero direct physical communication. The transference of this artificial relationship leads to vast expanses of fantasy. Yair's dreamscapes of nakedness and innocent frolicking in the rain, from his earlier letters, progress into fraught imaginings of an erotic union with Miriam, whilst denying all possibility of real contact. Miriam is enormously troubled by this, as her less capricious character is gradually seduced by Yair, only to be thwarted later by his unilateral decision to cease writing. If this were simply a love story, we would be called on here to expand on Yair's character and Miriam's strengths (as many of the reviews of this book do). But Grossman's manipulation of epistolarity suggests a more profound purpose in Be My Knife.

Influence of the European Epistolary Tradition

There are noteworthy precursors to Grossman's novel from a diverse range of European writers. Shklovsky's novel, Zoo, subtitled Letters Not about Love, published in Russian in 1923, whilst fulfilling many of the elements of epistolarity I mentioned earlier, is nonetheless groundbreaking. It combines real and fictitious letters, and is self-referential. Its subtitle could be used for Grossman's novel. Shklovsky's assertion on the raison d'être of his work, in his preface to his book, is close to Grossman's own impetus to write. To quote Shklovsky: "In an epistolary novel, the essential thing is motivation – precisely why should these two people be writing to each other? The usual motivation is love and partings... I built the book on a dispute between people of two cultures; the events mentioned in the text serve only as material for the metaphors." [27] These works are at the cutting edge of development of

epistolary fiction, and Grossman reinforces many of their contributions to the genre.[28]

The letter the addressee holds or tears up can be read as metonym for the writer. His fate is in her hands. The sentiment and materiality of the letter underscore its authenticity. These are manifest in tears and bloodstains on the page, as corps becomes corpus. Moreover the spontaneity of letter writing is emphasized by crossings out, unfinished letters, unsent drafts.[29] These comments about Zoo are strikingly valid for Be My Knife. Grossman includes the generic signs of spontaneity: cut-off sentences returned to later; the tensions of a secret epistolary relationship; the threat of being discovered during writing; concealed delivery points. This invites me to explore whether Grossman **has** written a novel of love letters, or whether Yair's initial pursuit of a literal soul-searching, of attempting to strip himself of his very epidermis, is a metaphor for a different type of search.

The elements of amorous discourse (referred to above) contained in Be My Knife seem to ensure that this be read as a love story.

> "Miriam,
> You don't know me. When I write to you I don't know myself very well either. I tried not to write, I did, I've tried for two days, but now I've broken down.
> I saw you at the class reunion a few days ago, but you didn't see me..."[30]

Grossman's motive is to present the lover as writing subject, as Barthes does, not as a real person.

Both Yair and Miriam come from a similar family unit: husband, wife and child. Both spouses appear as warm, understanding, and neutral in the text. Yair maintains more than once that he and Maya are happily married, although

intimating that the composition of their family is tricky: "As you know, a triangle is always a very shaky geometric construction."[31] Yair has a son of five, Ido, who is starting to show some stubbornness. Miriam's young son, Yochai, suffers from epilepsy and a form of autism that manifests itself with diminishing capacity for speech. As the novel progresses, it emerges that he is her stepchild.

Despite my claims of two major protagonists, Grossman presents the feminine perspective in a more limited scale than the masculine one. There is a multi-facetted exploration of Yair, and a rather narrower presentation of Miriam: a narrower range of hopes and anxieties, and less conflict in their resolution. Miriam reflects her frustrations with caring for Yochai, and she begins to pattern, but never initiate, Yair's quest for honesty, for nakedness and exposure. Both protagonists are searching for the child within, yet in Miriam's case, this manifests itself as the yearning to have her own biological child.

The concept of nakedness and exposure is the leitmotif of the letters. It represents the facets of identity under scrutiny in the novel. Grossman develops these facets through relating Yair's dreamscapes of running naked in the rain, and through fantasies he then creates with Miriam in mind. They are sometimes artistic and sexual, but they are never erotic, for it is a more profound sense of expression and openness that he is searching for.

Writing of himself Yair says:

> "He wants right at this minute to take off his clothes, strip off his epidermis, everything, and stand before you bare, right down to the white kernel of his soul."

> "...don't get me wrong, I'm not talking about the nakedness of passion right now – but a completely different kind of nakedness, one you can hardly stand in front of without shock and a quick escape into clothes. The nakedness of peeled skin, this is what I'm looking for..."[32]

Doubt creeps in: this is less of a romance and a series of love letters... and more an expression of crisis. Not the adolescent crisis that Grossman writes of in his earlier novels, but an adult crisis. Adolescent crisis is typically a rebellion against the framework of the world as the young person finds it. Adult crisis is typically the rebellion against the framework the adult creates for himself.[33]

As a counterpoint to amorous discourse, the theme of parent-child relationships is extremely relevant in this novel and sheds light on the adult crisis Yair is experiencing. The child's world intrudes repeatedly: Yair's relationship with his son Ido and Miriam's with her son Yochai inform the psychological development of the novel. Grossman has presented tremendous insight and nuance in his portrayal of this dynamic. The particulars of Yochai's autism and the inarticulateness he presents reflect on the deep meaning of the idea of the infant, all body and physical requirements, before speech, prior to verbal communication. Miriam's affection, frustration and resolve in caring for him, despite the difficulties and realities of his being her stepson, are juxtaposed against Yair's egocentric impatience with his son.

Key psychological issues emerge from this. The two families live in Jerusalem, but when Ido contracts mumps, Yair escapes from home and city to preclude any chance of his being infected. Yair fears the possible result of impotence, the child apprehending the father's fertile fulfilment. He goes to Tel Aviv, at times referred to in the book as "Sin City". This concept of the

different roles of the cities is reinforced: the "small family hotel" he is familiar with in Tel Aviv and where he immediately checks in for the week has become, since his last visit, a brothel, offering rooms by the hour! His turmoil and isolation vastly increase. His ill-advised journey to Tel Aviv contains many confrontations with his own soul.[34]

His re-entry into a womb-like hotel room, where he frantically surrounds himself with Miriam's letters, illuminates the contrast between word and reality. Yair misses opportunities of resolution or reconciliation with either of the two women, Maya and Miriam, who come to Tel Aviv to reach out to him. There are echoes of the White Room from Section Two of See under: Love.[35] There, Momik/Shlomo was seeking his inspiration, his muse, and his connection with history. Here, Yair is confronting the edge of madness: he is pushing at the boundaries of his relationships with the other gender, painfully leading him to the profound understanding that the conflicts are more deep-seated, that in fact his parent-child relationships are his barrier to fulfilment. For Grossman, a master craftsman of the child's world-view, the resolution of ontological problems remains enmeshed within these perspectives. The adult world-view of Yair is full of illusion and delusion. The search affords access to both Yair and Miriam's moments of utmost psychic pain.

> "I never met a person in whose hands I wanted to deliver my soul in this way – nor did I ever think I would trust her to put me together again, correctly.
> ... in recent past weeks I thought, with my usual denseness, that if I had a purpose in life, it was you – or it has something to do with you, or that through you I will somehow reach it... Now I will have to go back and look for this purpose in a different, and simpler, place."[36]

B. Exploring Intertextual Signification as It Creates Identity.

With reference to Letters to Milena, by Kafka, the question arises how a non-fictional collection fits as source and intertext for Be My Knife. An astonishing transformation or metamorphosis has occurred, since Kafka's true-life letters do now take their place in his fictional oeuvre. Bizarrely, yet obviously, they fulfil the criteria required from the epistolary tradition of letters in fiction which demands of the reader to enter into a contract with the author – that they posit an authentic signature and intrinsic correspondence. Cook describes epistolary writing as providing the crossover between public and private domains[37]. This sense of crossover epitomizes the phenomenon.

In Kafka, Grossman recognised a real kindred sense of searching: Kafka lived in a family that was materialistic and corporeal. There was no-one to decode his sensibilities, his inner language; he felt betrayed and lonely; Grossman could empathise with this search for expression.[38]

The original English working title of Be My Knife was "Words into Flesh". This was taken, not directly from the Hebrew, but from the poem in the dedication Hebrew Lesson #5, by the Israeli poet Chezi Laskly, quoted above[39]. This intertext questions the premise of the novel, namely that pure love can exist perhaps in words only, and every contact with the physical person reduces it. That is if you continue to read this book as love letters:

"I wrote a letter to my love

And on the way I dropped it..." continues the children's rhyme.

Barthes makes the distinction between a love story, in this case love letters, and "narratives of episodes", not the sentiment of love itself: "If you

put the lover in a 'love story', you thereby reconcile him with society. Why? Because telling stories is one of the activities coded by society... Society tames the lover through the love story."[40] The novel's title in Hebrew, שתהיי לי הסכין (*Sheh-Tehi Li HaSakin)*, reflects a different resonance. It is an uncertainty expressed in the conditional tense of the phrase, more accurately translated as "that you should be the knife unto me".

The misreading, or presentation of the book as a set of love letters, is reinforced by the evolution of the cover of both Grossman and Kafka's books once in English translation... On the English cover is an old-fashioned colour photograph of an idealised beauty, no doubt gleaned from Yair's words: "My good little girl with the fifties face."[41] Similarly the photograph of Milena on the English publication, black-and-white, tattered around the edges, is a poignant reminder of a woman lost to Kafka, and lost during the Holocaust too. In stark contrast the Hebrew covers are abstract and harsh, more brittle; evocative of the overwrought process of exploration they are describing.[42]

It is necessary to look beyond the surface of Grossman's intertexts to arrive at the underlying meaning of the book. There is the self-referential nature of his intertexts (i.e. references to his own previous texts) – Yair's imagined conversation with Rilke is an immediate link to the quotation used in the epigraph to The Book of Intimate Grammar.[43] Grossman most decidedly wants the reader to recall that book's young protagonist, Aaron, since he refers to the old discarded refrigerators, one of the enduring images of The Book of Intimate Grammar. Then he summons the ghost of himself as a young boy:

> "Only to report that the Child has probably returned to roost. It must be my nightmares, or because of our correspondence... I've given him the right to exist by writing to you about him. ... Please don't tell me it's

> only childish imagination, of course it is, it is exactly the imagination of my childhood – it hits me, leaving me altogether paralyzed... I have to see him, to produce him emerging from the darkness... I want to show this child-that-was-Yair that he has a new child, that he escaped from that and made something that exists independently, in the outside world."[44]

"The more a genre evolves and the more complex it becomes, the better it remembers its past."[45] This is true in critical terms, and true intrinsically, as the more complex Yair's thoughts and relationships become, the more significant a role memory takes. His traumatic relationship with his father is recalled, as is its powerful impact; perhaps then the greatest achievement of this discourse is to lead him to better understand it and triumph over it.

There is a direct call to re-evaluate the father-child and child-father relationship – in the psychoanalytical context as the need for rebellion against the father to achieve self-realisation. In the final section, Yair as father cannot manage his son Ido's oppositional behaviour, and, ever more desperate, he telephones Miriam to come and help, redeem, offer mediation and facilitate his reconciliation with his inner child. It is Miriam as facilitator that he needs, rather than as love object.

The question of closure, discussed briefly in the earlier remarks about the epistolary genre[46], sheds light on the interpretation suggested here. The closure of section one consists of Yair deciding unilaterally to stop writing; there is no convincing sense that he has achieved the inner truth or the purity of relationship he was seeking. In section two Miriam continues her feverish attempt to contact Yair directly, hoping that he will renege on his resolve to

make no further contact. Closure is open-ended. Section three is pregnant with meaning, literally and figuratively: Miriam calls her newly discovered pregnancy the "rainbow-like gift", and there are the curative and transforming powers the rain exerts on all their relationships, Yair and Ido, Yair and Miriam. But detective work is called for, both in the need to reread the novel itself, and to return to Kafka's letters, to better understand their relevance. This has been the stumbling block for many of Grossman's reviewers and critics.[47] The inescapable connection with Kafka's Letter to my Father emerges:

Firstly, in the edition of Letters to Milena published in Hebrew that Grossman would have encountered, Letter to my Father is included in the collection. Secondly, Kafka refers to this letter several times in his correspondence with Milena. He explains why he wrote it and never delivered it, and how he would love to show it to her. And thirdly, significantly, Grossman invokes this connection when Yair questions how his son will remember him:

> "...my son, the post-factum infant, my old son, a little man...perhaps he will get confused for a moment and think that he is my father?" "But someday in the year 2065, he will smile at me, with bald gums and glazed-over eyes, and tell me that it's all right, he too understands now the instability of the verdicts imposed in our penal colony – that one time you are Franz Kafka – and another time you're his father, Hermann..."[48]

Thus the final section can be seen not only as the first opportunity for Miriam and Yair to hear one another's voices, but the full reconciling of the tensions of the book. For Miriam this means fulfilling her maternal, physical

role both towards Yair and within herself. She sets off to rescue the child, Ido, from the "child", Yair, and as the narrative ties in another dénouement, she discovers she is pregnant. Yair experiences emotional exposure and reconciliation with the father who tormented him, whom he felt himself turning into. There is a visual rounding off of these relationships as the novel draws to a close: Yair and Ido are linked together, lying together, blue with cold but reconciled.

The book challenges the polarities and paradoxes of the epistolary genre, as structurally and contextually it moves from an epistolary love affair to a psycho-analytical reappraisal of adult crisis. Grossman's aim is to reappraise identity and decode the complexities around him, as context and intertext inform scenario and plot, voice and character, interrogator and witness.

ENDNOTES

[1] David Grossman, Be My Knife, translated by Vered Almog and Maya Gurantz (London, 2002), 8. Hereafter Grossman, Be My Knife.

[2] Franz Kafka, Letters to Milena, edited by Willy Haas, translated by Tani and James Stern (London, 1983), 159. Hereafter Kafka, Letters to Milena.

[3] Grossman, Be My Knife, 230

[4] Jacques Derrida, The Post Card – From Socrates to Freud and Beyond, translated by Alan Bass. (London, 1987), 48: "Mixture (of all forms and of all styles) is the letter, the epistle, which is not a genre but all genres, literature itself." Hereafter Derrida, Post Card.

[5] With hindsight, it is clear that 1998 was fraught with problems politically. However these problems were far less obtrusive for everyday life in Israel, where the economy and tourism were thriving.

[6] Roland Barthes, The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962 – 1980, translated by Linda Coverdale (New York, 1985), 301.

7 See Chapter Two, p71 and n50. The novel which follows this one, Someone to Run With, has equivalent status for its two protagonists, Assaf and Tamar, male and female. I discuss this in Chapter Four, p177.

[8] In A Lover's Discourse, Roland Barthes deliberately calls the Addressee of the love letter "the beloved object" to obscure male and female stereotype. Roland Barthes, A Lover's Discourse – Fragments, translated by Richard Howard (London, 2002). Originally published in French in 1977.

[9] Janet Gurkin Altman, Epistolarity – Approaches to a Form (Columbus, 1982).
Earlier examples of epistolary fiction and the elements of epistolarity that were manifest in the European tradition have been comprehensively discussed by David Patterson in A Phoenix in Fetters: Studies in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Hebrew Fiction (Savage, Maryland, 1988) chapter 2 "Epistolary Elements in the Novels of Abraham Mapu" 21-25.

[10] Grossman, Be My Knife, 116, 215. Grossman has discussed how he originally wrote Miriam's early letters into the text, as a form of Talmudic responsa, but that shortly before submitting the work for publication, he decided to rewrite the section, withdrawing these letters from the novel altogether.
Address at Edinburgh International Book Festival, 17-08-2002.

[11] See Chapter Four, 174.

[12] Grossman, Be My Knife, 207-9.

[13] Ibid, 269.

[14] Linda S. Kauffman, Special Delivery: Epistolary Modes in Modern Fiction (Chicago, 1992). Hereafter Kauffman, Special Delivery.

[15] Linda S. Kauffman, Discourses of Desire – Gender, Genre and Epistolary Fictions (London, 1986), 18. Hereafter Kauffman, Discourses of Desire.

[16] Abraham B. Yehoshua. Mr Mani, translated from the Hebrew by Hillel Halkin (London, 1993). Original publication in Hebrew, *Mar Mani: Roman Sichot* (Tel Aviv, 1990).

[17] Amos Oz, Black Box, translated by Nicholas de Lange (London, 1988). Original publication in Hebrew, *Kufsah Shechorah* (Tel Aviv, 1987).

[18] Benjamin Tammuz, Minotaur, translated by Kim Parfitt and Mildred Budney (New York, 1982). Original publication in Hebrew, 1980. *Minotaur* (Jerusalem, 1992)

[19] I.L. Peretz, "The Woman Mistress Hannah" in Stories and Pictures, translated by Helena Frank (Philadelphia, 1943), 382.

[20] There were elements of epistolarity used in partial measure in the novels of Joseph Perl, Abraham Mapu and their successors, Peretz Smolenskin, Reuben Asher Braudes and others during the 19th and early 20th centuries. See Chapters 2 and 3 in Patterson, Fetters.

[21] Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook, Epistolary Bodies – Gender and Genre in the Eighteenth-Century Republic of Letters (Stanford CA, 1996), 179. Hereafter Cook, Epistolary Bodies.

[22] Ibid, 26.

[23] Chezi Laskly, "Hebrew Lesson #5" in *Ha-'Akhbarim .ve-Le'ah Goldberg : shirim 1987-1989*) (Hebrew text) (Tel Aviv, 1992). (The Mice and Leah Goldberg).

[24] Grossman, Be My Knife, 5.

[25] Ibid, 21.

[26] Ibid, 41.

[27] Viktor Shklovsky, Zoo or Letters Not about Love, translated from the Russian and edited by Richard Sheldon (London, Cornell University Press, 1971). Author's preface, 4. Barthes' text, A Lover's Discourse – Fragments (*Fragments d'un Discours Amoureux*), which could serve as another tantalising subtitle for Grossman's novel, is equally experimental.

[28] See also p227 n10 for the reference to David Patterson's discussion on the 18th and 19th century European epistolary tradition.

[29] Kauffman, Special Delivery, 40-42.

[30] Grossman, Be My Knife, 3.

[31] Ibid, 30.

[32] Ibid, 5, 30.

[33] Gershon Shaked in his review article in *Ha'aretz* newspaper, clearly labels this as a "mid-life crisis". Since Yair is 33 years old, and Miriam 40, I prefer to use the term "adult crisis", representing as mentioned earlier a switch from a child's world view to an adult one. *Ha'aretz*, Books Section (in Hebrew). 13-05-1998, 1. "ספרות היא סכין הנובר בקרבנו" ("Literature is the knife that burrows inside us"). Hereafter Shaked, *Ha'aretz* - Books

[34] I have referred to the historical context (or a-historical context) of the book, see 206. Yet it certainly has a strong geographical locus. Nurit Gertz discusses the competition between the two cities in literature in her article "Jerusalem and Tel Aviv as Metaphors in Hebrew Literature", Modern Hebrew Literature, Spring 1982, NS2, 23-27.

[35] See Chapter Three, 114 and Chapter One, 43.

[36] Grossman, Be My Knife, 209

[37] See 214 and n21.

[38] In his essay, " ספרים שקראו אותי " ("Books that have Read Me") Grossman mentions his debt to Kafka. "Books that have Read Me" in Ruth Kartun-Blum (ed.), Writers and Poets on Sources of Inspiration, (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 2002), 45. He expanded on his sense of empathy with Kafka's quest for self-expression in his address at the Edinburgh International Book Festival, 17-08-2002: "Kafka lived in a family that was very materialistic, very corporeal. There was no-one to decode his sensibilities, his inner language. He felt betrayed and lonely; within the family came the first exposure to these feelings."
Derrida, too, has chosen to refer to Kafka's Letters to Milena in his exploration of epistolary fiction, The Post Card. For Derrida a traumatic childhood memory resonates with the power of Kafka's letters of soul-searching: Jacques Derrida, Post Card, 34-35.

[39] Roland Barthes, The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962-1980, translated by Linda Coverdale (Berkley, 1991), 302.

[41] Grossman, Be My Knife, 182.

[42] See cover images in Appendix.

[43] See my discussion of this in Chapter Four, 137 and n1, and 176 and n106.

[44] Grossman, Be My Knife, 104-5, 106.

[45] Linda Kauffman, Discourses of Desire, 282.

[46] See 209, point 5.

[47] A brief consideration of the critical response to Be My Knife sheds further light on the view of misreading. The Israeli literary press contains a high level of literary interchange and dialogue in the form of critical reviews and articles. Most Hebrew- and English-language reviewers decried Grossman's departure from previous achievements, as if punishing the author for changing genres. They denounce what they called Yair's' verbosity. The appreciation of the author's art is more frequently linked to his previous work than to this one. Yigal Schwartz gives a valuable interpretation on the theme of nakedness in Be My Knife, as reflected in Yair's search for his "inner kernel of the soul". For Schwartz the message of this book lies in the fact that Grossman's heroes find it impossible to achieve a true and comprehensive love with another person. Hence their withdrawal to a world of words alone, to the "intimate grammar" of words. Schwartz sees the final episode of the book, where Yair is found lying naked outside with Ido in the rain and mud, blue with cold, as part of the theme of nakedness and exposure. He stops short of linking this episode with Yair's urgent need for deeper reconciliation, with his son and with his own childhood. [Yigal Schwartz in *Yediot Achronot* – Weekend Edition (in Hebrew) 26-061998, 26 "*Ad HaGalin HaLavan Shel HaNefesh*" ("To the White Kernel of the Soul")]

Professor Gershon Shaked published a well-considered appraisal of the full power of the book. Yet there is no mention of Kafka's father, Herman. [Shaked, *Ha'aretz* Book Review] Linda Grant, British author and journalist, evaluates the ending as "an act of engagement with the outside world, a penetration of Yair's privacy, that is transforming". Linda Grant, "Intimacy from Afar", in The Guardian, Saturday edition, 16-02-2002. I believe this is only a part of the picture.

[48] Grossman, Be My Knife, 60-61.

CONCLUSION

'Who am I?' – In Search of Self

Genre and Identity in the Works of David Grossman

"And so our interest in literature becomes cognitive: an interest in finding out (by seeing and feeling and otherwise perceiving) what possibilities (and tragic impossibilities) life offers to us, what hopes and fears for ourselves it underwrites or subverts."[1] I began this thesis with Martha Nussbaum's insight on the power of literature, and its relevance to David Grossman's writing. He is continuing to write rich and controversial works, a fact that extends the metaphor of *Meta-Bildungsroman* I have used in my exploration of David Grossman's opus: he is still in the process of creating his full vision.

In considering Grossman's contributions I have sought to reinforce the particularity of Todorov's general comment on literary genre: "In literature, every work modifies the sum of possible works, each new example alters the species. ... A text is both the product of pre-existing combinatorial system and a transformation of that system."[2]

In this thesis I have explored Grossman's use of genre to articulate facets of identity:

- the young person's fragile identity: in a world where uncertainty and vulnerability seem to be demeaning, the young adolescent seeks validation for an identity that may not conform to hero-type, or for forging a new designation of hero;

- establishing a political identity based on humanism and moral principles of justice;

- gathering the shreds of a lost and disintegrating identity for refugees from tragedy and destruction;

- re-evaluating adult identity in the midst of crises, both political and personal;

- seeking a true expression of love and self-validation through understanding intimacy and parent-child relationships.

I have discussed the precariousness of identity; telling and retelling of stories lost and misconstrued is the only way to gather the fragments of identity. This reinforces Maureen Whitebrook's appraisal of the vulnerability of narrative identity in modern literature: "Identity is liable to questioning, doubling, splitting of multiplicity."[3] Grossman's narrative structuring is a continuing search for authentic language to configure identity, to ascertain the raw kernel of the individual. He presents the dematerialised persona (Bruno Schultz) and the transmigration of souls, where only language remains (in See under: Love). Conveying the essence of conflict and complexity of reconciliation, he portrays the Arab voice – at times inchoate, at times communicating an unwavering sense of honour (as in the case of Khilmi in The Smile of the Lamb). His frenetic young protagonist redeems and purifies language in a private inner brain under his heart (Aron in The Book of Intimate Grammar). There is the quixotic quest for identity, as heard in Nono's query, "Who am I?" (in The Zig-Zag Kid). And the tentative letter-writer Yair visualises his pineal gland, containing the essence of his identity and his

ability to achieve pure love, to profoundly connect with another. In Someone to Run With, Assaf pursues the core evidence to construct the identity of Tamar. He devises stories about Tamar from the contents of her diary, the written work; he is impatient to compare his imaginary constructs with the real person.

Further questions are illuminated in Grossman's ongoing writing, but which I have mentioned only cursorily in this thesis. A significant one concerns the woman's voice, as written by a male author. This device has become more familiar in recent years. For a full analysis of this issue, which is beyond the scope of this thesis, many aspects of feminine instinct and feminist theory would be brought into play, particularly the question of whether a man can fully understand and embrace a woman's perspective. For this reason the sheer feminine construct of Inside Another Person – in Hebrew, בגוף אני מביזה[4] – strikes an unequivocal tone for Grossman's new direction, begun in lesser degree in The Smile of the Lamb and Be My Knife. I have argued previously that his female characters are less well-rounded than his male, but that a development can surely be noted. This development can be seen from the vantage point of his opus as *Meta-Bildungsroman* and from the vision of Grossman as a courageous writer, prepared to tackle new themes and engage new "voices". In both cases it is a natural progression for him to engage the question of adult male-female relationships, and (as he does in the second of the two novellas) the feminine viewpoint entirely.[5]

A second question relates to Jerusalem as a very particular urban space. Alluded to in several of my chapters, this issue may become more relevant in considering Israel as the site of current trauma. Jerusalem is the focal point of conflict: ancient beliefs, national myths and present conflicts. It is a place where Arabs and Jews live precariously cheek by jowl, on the frontline of the *Intifada*. But often in Grossman's work it appears as just another modern conurbation.

As Grossman's stature in the literary canon of Israel continues to increase, he has undoubtedly spawned a new generation of emerging authors who can be read as his "younger brothers", or disciples.

Israel has experienced many vicissitudes of war, and its inhabitants have widely witnessed human disaster and trauma. In his writing Grossman tackles these difficult and emotive subjects with integrity and wit. Yet what are life stories of trauma? Kai Erikson provides a useful definition. "Human-caused communal trauma can mean not only loss of confidence in the self, but a loss of confidence in the scaffolding of family and community, in the structures of human government, in the larger logic by which humankind lives, and in the ways of nature itself."[6]

In his recent collection of essays, Death as a Way of Life, Grossman insists that no-one should avoid underestimating the continued presence of trauma in Israel today. He particularly rues the fact that for every person, Israeli or Palestinian, "life is being dissipated, squandered in a pointless struggle, and his identity and self-respect and the one life he has to live are being endlessly expropriated from him..."[7]

Grossman further interrogates the premise of identity in the real world of Israel today: "All of us (are required) to ask the most difficult questions of ourselves, about our identity, our faith, and our courage or cowardice."[8] The route he will pursue within his fictional domain in relation to his concept of identity will surely reflect this current pain, either directly or by its very absence. However, Grossman's concerns are not in the horror which the narratives reveal, but rather in their human complexities. I have argued that Grossman's work is and continues to be responsive to the social, cultural and political background of Israel. This is expressed by social literary critic Michael Wilding's belief in the "microcosm-macrocosm, that vision that each individual contains in microcosm the forces and tension of the macrocosm. No matter how small the object on which we focus – the single community, the couple, the individual, the atom – it embodies the same forces of the cosmic whole."[9]

How will Grossman **continue** to represent the teller and the tale?

ENDNOTES

[1] Martha Nussbaum, Loves Knowledge (Oxford, 1990) 171.

[2] Tzvetan Todorov, The Fantastic – a Structural Approach to a Literary Genre. Translated by Richard Howard (Cleveland, 1973), 6-7.

[3] Maureen Whitebrook, Identity, Narrative and Politics (London, 2001), 45.

[4] David Grossman, *Ba-Guf Ani Mevinah* (Inside Another Person) in Hebrew (Israel, 2002). This collection of two novellas lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

[5] There is a rich crop now of novels, and academic texts that comment on them, authored by males but delivering female personas. This raises the idea of cultural identities in transition.

[6] Kai Erikson, A New Species of Trouble – Explorations in Disaster, Trauma and Community (New York, 1994) quoted by Arthur A. Hansen, "Human disaster, Social Trauma and Community Memory" in K.L. Rogers, S Leydesdorff and G Dawson (eds.), Trauma and Life Stories – International Perspectives (London, 1999) 221.

[7] David Grossman, "Preface" in Death as a Way of Life – Israel Ten Years After Oslo. Translated by Haim Watzman, edited by Efrat Lev (London, 2003), vii.

[8] Ibid., 77.

[9] Michael Wilding, Social Visions (Sydney, Australia, 1993), 169. Wilding's book explores the ways in which novelists deal with issues of society and politics.

APPENDIX

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